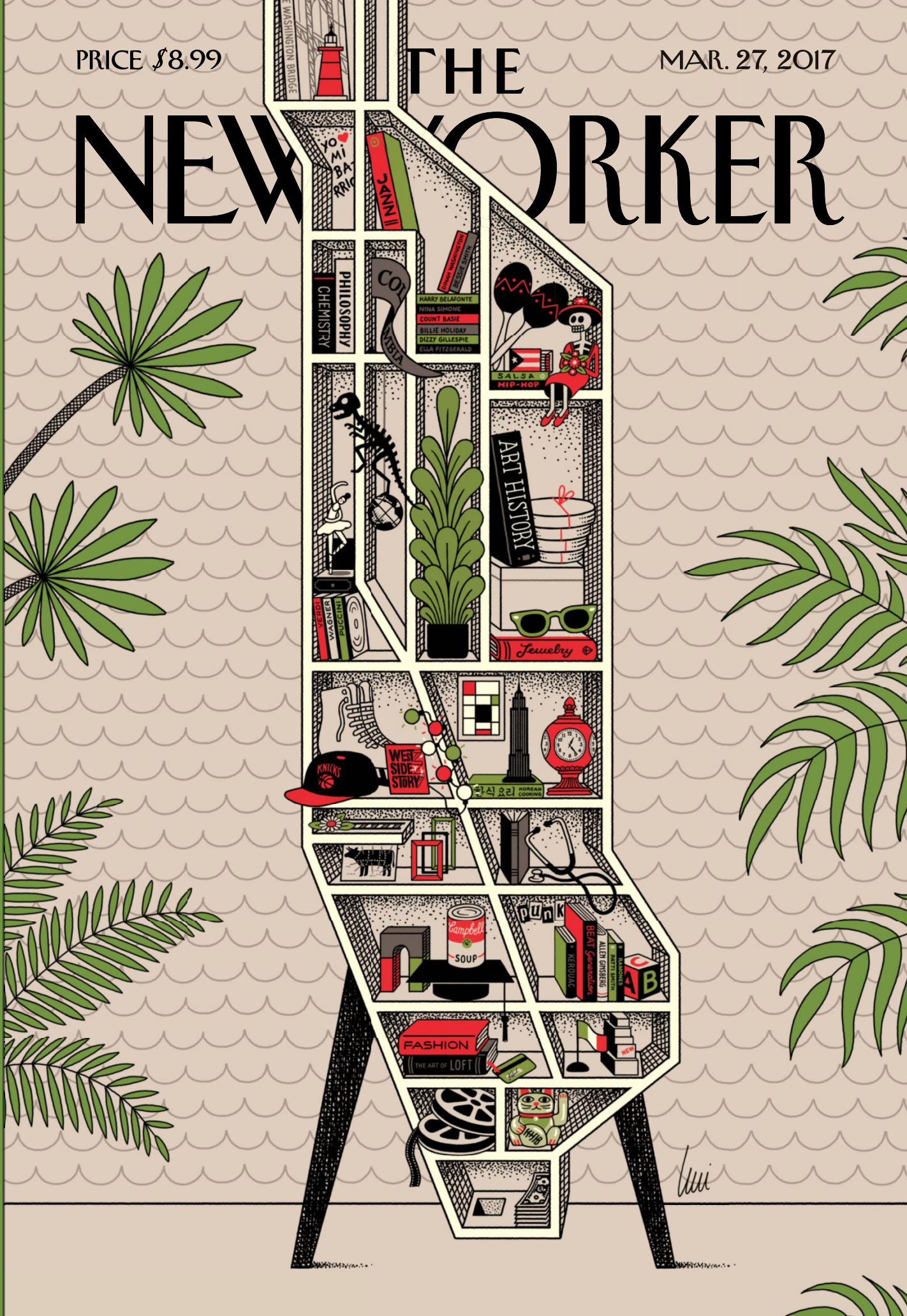


PRICE \$8.99

MAR. 27, 2017

THE NEW YORKER



THE NEW YORKER

MARCH 27, 2017

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Mayer (*"Trump's Money Man,"* p. 34), a staff writer, is the author of *"Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right."*

Victor Lodato (*Fiction*, p. 56) published his latest novel, *"Edgar and Lucy,"* this month.

Frank Ormsby (*Poem*, p. 43) lives in Belfast. His collection *"The Darkness of Snow"* will come out in September.

Luci Gutiérrez (*Cover*), an illustrator based in Barcelona, contributes regularly to the *Wall Street Journal* and *Time* magazine. She is currently working on a new book.

Bruce McCall (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 29) has painted more than seventy-five *New Yorker* covers and contributed more than eighty pieces for *Shouts & Murmurs* since 1980.

Sheila Marikar (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 16) has been a contributor since 2016. She is currently writing a book.

Joshua Rothman (*"A Science of the Soul,"* p. 46), *The New Yorker's* archive editor, is a frequent contributor to newyorker.com.

Elizabeth Kolbert (*"Minority Report,"* p. 20) is a staff writer. Her book *"The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History"* won a Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction in 2015.

Ruth Franklin (*Books*, p. 73) is the author of *"Shirley Jackson: A Rather Haunted Life."*

Michael Schulman (*The Talk of the Town*, p. 19; *"The Listener,"* p. 30) has contributed to the magazine since 2006. His book, *"Her Again: Becoming Meryl Streep,"* comes out in paperback in April.

Jill Lepore (*A Critic at Large*, p. 66) teaches at Harvard and is writing a history of the United States.

Michele Glazer (*Poem*, p. 63) directs the creative-writing programs at Portland State University. Her latest book is *"On Tact, & the Made Up World."*

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🔊 PODCAST

On this week's episode, Victor Lodato reads "Herman Melville, Volume I," his short story from the issue.



📺 VIDEO

In Cuba, where women are banned from competitive boxing, a thirteen-year-old girl steps into the ring.

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THE MAIL

TRUMP AND FRAUD

President Trump's entire individual and business tax returns—far more pertinent and informative than the two pages from his 2005 return that were leaked last week—may provide some answers to questions about his puzzling legal and financial ties in Azerbaijan, which Adam Davidson wrote about in his recent piece (“Donald Trump’s Worst Deal,” March 13th). A 1924 law, the result of conflict-of-interest concerns about the Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon and executive-branch officials involved in the Teapot Dome scandal, gives Congress the authority to examine Trump’s returns and reveal them to the public without the President’s consent. Members of Congress cannot blame the absence of information solely on the President’s intransigence. Instead, they must explain why they favor the same secrecy that the President does.

George K. Yin

Professor of Law and Taxation

*University of Virginia School of Law
Charlottesville, Va.*

Even to news junkies with graduate degrees (like myself), the world of international finance is mind-numbingly complex and opaque. Yet the powerful people who inhabit that world are the ones who make many decisions that significantly affect the rest of us. How can we be a democratic society governed by rule of law if hardly anyone knows or understands what is going on in that world? I am grateful that Davidson waded into the unseemly muck for us and emerged with a clear picture.

Janet Grove

Missoula, Mont.

REFUGEES IN AMERICA

Recent chaos in the American political system has effectively drowned out stories of courage like the ones that Jake Halpern tells about Vive, a refugee safe house in upstate New York (“A New Underground Railroad,” March 13th). I’m sixteen years old, and am very nervous about the future of our country. I am

especially worried about what citizenship may mean for immigrants and refugees. My grandparents came to the Bronx from Dublin in the second half of the nineteen-fifties. Given the recent immigration issues, travel bans, and damaging rhetoric, I fear that their story will become a historical relic. Halpern closes his piece by quoting the Vive staff member Mariah Walker: “I never thought my country would be the one people had to run from.” It’s a sad but honest reflection. As many people around the world are persecuted for their beliefs and their appearance, it’s imperative that the United States not succumb to that same ignorance, fear, and hatred. It rose above the Fascist swing in Europe, and the Communist movement in Eastern Europe and Asia. It must now rise above Islamophobia and nationalism.

Thomas Carty

Pleasantville, N.Y.

WHY HEALTH CARE FAILS

Atul Gawande’s thoughtful piece on the Republicans’ alternative to Obamacare doesn’t mention one of the underlying factors, which he has written about before, that will affect any national plan from any party (Comment, March 6th). Doctors, hospitals, and drug and medical-device companies in the U.S. charge far more than their counterparts in other countries. Yet the U.S. spends more on health care than other high-income countries, and with worse outcomes. As a people, we also eat, drink, think, and move in ways that often contribute to poor health. This is not a primary concern of individuals, physicians, or health-care organizations. Are there no responses other than each provider group saying “It’s not us,” while making more money, and then fighting over which payment system is better or worse for whom?

Douglas K. Ferguson

Chico, Calif.

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Letters should be sent with the writer’s name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.



MARCH 22 – 28, 2017

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Fresh off Ryan Murphy's "Feud" comes another diva smackdown: a new musical about the rivalry between Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden, who ran competing cosmetics empires. Though they never actually met, both women used eyeliner and chutzpah to reshape mid-century ideas about beauty. In **"War Paint"** (now in previews, at the Nederlander), with a score by Scott Frankel and Michael Korie ("Grey Gardens"), they're played by Patti LuPone and Christine Ebersole, no strangers to the D-word. Let the lipstick fly!

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF BROWN

MOVIES

OPENING

I Called Him Morgan Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening March 24. (In limited release.) • **Life A** science-fiction film, directed by Daniel Espinosa, about a Martian organism that gets loose on a spaceship and threatens to conquer Earth. Starring Ryan Reynolds, Rebecca Ferguson, and Jake Gyllenhaal. Opening March 24. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

Frantz

The new film from François Ozon takes place just after the First World War, and the action is shared between enemies; the first part is set in a small German town, and the second is centered in Paris. Reconciliation, however well meant, turns out to be an elusive ideal. Paula Beer, whose performance gains momentum as the plot unfolds, plays Anna, who lost her fiancé, Frantz (Anton von Lucke), in the conflict; she still lives with his parents, the Hoffmeisters (Ernst Stötzner and Marie Gruber). They are visited by Adrien Rivoire (Pierre Niney), a tremulous Frenchman, who says that he was a friend of Frantz, and whose recollections bring solace to the bereaved. As Ozon's admirers will know, however, from "Under the Sand" (2000) and "In the House" (2012), mourners can surprise both themselves and others, and the telling of tales can lead one down curious paths. Thus, when Anna travels to a still hostile France, all that she believes begins to fall apart. On the surface, the film—shot in black and white, with short surges of color—is placid and polite, yet what stirs beneath feels unhappy and unresolved. In French and German.—Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 3/20/17.) (In limited release.)

Get Out

A young white woman named Rose (Allison Williams) takes Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), her black boyfriend, to meet her parents for the first time. They live, in some style, in the country, and Chris, though an unruffled soul, feels a mild trepidation. But Rose's father (Bradley Whitford) and mother (Catherine Keener), liberal to a fault, offer a warm welcome; if anything, it is their African-American staff—Walter (Marcus Henderson) and Georgina (Betty Gabriel)—who make Chris feel more uneasy. A party for friends and family, the day after the couple's arrival, deepens his suspicion that something is awry, and the final third of the film bursts into open hostility and dread. The writer and director is Jordan Peele, making his feature-film debut, and the result feels inflammatory to an astounding degree. If the awkward social comedy of the early scenes winds up as a flat-out horror movie, that, we feel, is because Peele finds the state of race relations so horrific—irreparably so—that no other reaction will suffice. Kaluuya makes a likable hero, for whom we heartily root.—A.L. (3/6/17) (In wide release.)

I Called Him Morgan

One of the traumas of modern music was the death of the trumpeter Lee Morgan, at the age of thirty-three, when he was shot in a Lower East Side jazz club, in 1972, by his common-law wife, Helen

Morgan. Kasper Collin's documentary is centered on the sole recorded interview granted by Helen, in 1996, shortly before her death. Her story, as presented by Collin, has a vast historical dimension, focussing on her life in New York in the nineteen-fifties, where she defied the limited opportunities for black women and turned her midtown apartment into a freestyle artistic salon. Interviews with Lee Morgan's great musical cohorts, such as Wayne Shorter and Albert (Tootie) Heath, reveal the jazz circuit's high-risk behind-the-scenes activities, involving fast cars, sharp clothes, sexual conquests, and, often, drugs. When Lee's career was derailed by his heroin addiction, Helen took him under her wing and checked him into rehab. When he came out clean, they lived together as a couple and she managed his triumphant comeback; then he left her for another woman, and tragedy ensued. With an insightful blend of interviews and music, archival footage and photographs, Collin anchors this resonant double portrait in its subjects' enduringly influential artistic scene and era.—Richard Brody (In limited release.)

Kong: Skull Island

An unmapped and storm-girdled island, deep in the South Pacific, is too much to resist. Hence the expeditionary force that is dispatched there—set in motion by a scientist (John Goodman), guided by a British tracker (Tom Hiddleston), and caught on film by a dauntless photographer (Brie Larson). Military muscle is provided by a squad of American troops, newly released from the toils of the Vietnam War and commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Preston Packard (Samuel L. Jackson), who is already itching for another conflict. The fun starts—and it starts with admirable speed—when the island proves to be far from uninhabited. In residence is a U.S. pilot (John C. Reilly), who's been stranded there for almost thirty years and has never heard of the Cold War ("They take the summers off?"); a bunch of prehistoric nasties with a grievance; and a monkey the size of the Chrysler Building, whom we seem to have met somewhere before. The director of this heady nonsense is Jordan Vogt-Roberts, who sees no reason that "Apocalypse Now" should not be mashed up with monster flicks; the result, apart from a stale patch in the middle, is dished up with energy and verve.—A.L. (3/13/17) (In wide release.)

Personal Shopper

Kristen Stewart, who has made a wise habit of turning to distinctive directors, colludes again with Olivier Assayas. In "Clouds of Sils Maria" (2014), she played the assistant to a celebrated actress; here she takes a similar but grimmer role as Maureen, the dogsbody who runs around buying clothes and bags for a celebrity (Nora von Waldstätten) of no perceptible talent. Any social satire, though, is lightly handled, for Assayas has other zones of obsession and frustration to explore. Maureen is psychic, and desperate to hear from her twin brother, who succumbed to a heart condition from which she also suffers. In that spirit, the movie becomes a ghost story, with the heroine prowling a vacant house in search of the dead; as if that were not enough, death then shows up uninvited, in the shape of a savage murder. Some audiences will doubtless be baffled and annoyed by this mixing of genres and tones, yet Assayas and

Stewart just about hold things together, and there are thrilling stretches—Maureen exchanging texts with an unknown presence who could be a killer, a stalker, or a phantom soul—when the movie stops your breath.—A.L. (3/20/17) (In limited release.)

Raw

Julia Ducournau's movie tells the tale of Justine (Garance Marillier), who is joining her older sister Alexia (Ella Rumpf) at veterinary school. Justine arrives there as a hardworking student, a strict vegetarian, and a blushing timid soul; what we observe, in stages, is the process by which she turns into a lusty carnivore on the rampage. The trigger is the hazing ritual to which she and other novices must submit, which involves, among other delights, a shower of blood and the chomping of a raw rabbit kidney—sufficient to give Justine a craving for flesh of other kinds. She is not alone in her appetites, we learn, and Ducournau does not shy away from detailing the tasting menu that follows. Viewers with nervous stomachs should stay well clear, yet the film, however lurid, is memorable less for its capacity to disgust than for its portrayal of sisterly bonding, and for exploring the extent to which the characters—not merely the young ones, as a late revelation suggests—are both liberated and caged by bodily wants. In French.—A.L. (3/13/17) (In limited release.)

Song to Song

In this romantic drama, set in and around the Austin music scene, Terrence Malick places the transcendental lyricism of his later films on sharply mapped emotional terrain. It's a story of love skewed by ambition. Rooney Mara plays Faye, a young musician who falls into a relationship with a record-company mogul (Michael Fassbender) who can boost her career. Then she starts seeing another musician (Ryan Gosling), who also gets pulled into the impresario's orbit. The shifting triangle à la "Jules and Jim" is twisted by business conflicts and other players, including a waitress (Natalie Portman), a socialite (Cate Blanchett), and an artist (Bérénice Marlohe). Meanwhile, Patti Smith, playing herself, is the voice of conscience and steadfast purpose, in art and life alike. Without sacrificing any of the breathless ecstasy of his urgent, fluid, seemingly borderless images (shot by Emmanuel Lubezki), Malick girds them with a framework of bruising entanglements and bitter realizations, family history and stifled dreams. His sense of wonder at the joy of music and the power of love is also a mournful vision of paradise lost.—R.B. (In limited release.)

A Taste of Honey

When the blowsy Helen (Dora Bryan) says she never knew that her misfit daughter, Jo (Rita Tushingham), was talented, Jo retorts, "I'm not just talented, I'm geniused." There is a touch of genius to Shelagh Delaney's 1958 Manchester-set play about Jo's inchoate yearnings, her brief interracial romance, and the safe zone she creates with her only friend, a tender gay man (Murray Melvin). Jo is a flighty character with a bitter earthy streak, and her conflicting energies—expressed in sometimes edgy, sometimes fanciful dialogue—make this a near-classic of postadolescent confusion and longing. The director, Tony Richardson (who co-wrote the screenplay with Delaney), didn't find a visual style to match the verve of Delaney's language, but he cast the film superbly, and in the best scenes Walter Lassally's photography and John Addison's score help him achieve the perfect blend of poignancy and insouciance.—Michael Sragow (Film Forum; March 24 and March 28.)

THE THEATRE



Primal Edge

Bobby Cannavale stars in Eugene O'Neill's "The Hairy Ape."

I HADN'T LOOKED at Eugene O'Neill's 1922 play, "The Hairy Ape," in many years before I picked it up again recently, on the occasion of Richard Jones's interpretation of the work for the Park Avenue Armory (March 25–April 22). The standout actor Bobby Cannavale stars as Robert (Yank) Smith, a physically imposing stevedore on an ocean liner that's headed for New York. Yank is a "primitive" who grew up tough—his father beat him as a kid—but he doesn't dwell on the pain of the past; what matters to Yank is today. This pre-Depression world is dominated by the wealthy, and it's not clear where a man like Yank—who believes that a man's a man only as he inhabits the universe that is his body—fits in. Yank's older shipmate Paddy (David Costabile) doesn't worry about the rich, because the seamen run the boat, and they have power. But it's the rich who own the boat, and the world. Paddy misses the days when man and water and sea-craft were one. That was true freedom.

For his entire life (1888–1953), O'Neill loved water. As a boy, he spent summers with his family near the beach in New London, Connecticut, and as a young man he worked on freighters that travelled to places like Argentina and Honduras. In his plays,

ranging from early one-acts like "Thirst" to his Pulitzer Prize-winning "Anna Christie," the briny world affects his characters' interpretations, and misinterpretations, of life on dry land. In his masterpiece "Long Day's Journey Into Night," the ocean fog that shuts the characters off from the rest of the world is like another character—like God—that man alone can't cut through.

In "The Hairy Ape," Yank, insulted by a rich girl he meets in the stokehold, heads into a sharp, edgy New York, where everything he prizes about himself is considered loutish, out of synch with Manhattan sophistication. Written in a frenzied, layered style, O'Neill's play is filled with extraordinary energy and something that's not awfully popular these days: compassion for male pain. This is a specialty of Cannavale's acting. In the 2011 play "The Motherfucker with the Hat," his ex-jailbird character was so hopped up on what turned out to be false hope that once he learned the truth of love his tremendous physical energy collapsed, and those watching collapsed with him. Writing from inside Yank's deepest desires, dreams, and innocence, O'Neill created one of his more densely and poetically conceived scripts, about a world where language and the body confuse one another, and end up cancelling each other out.

—Hilton Als

Amélie

Phillipa Soo ("Hamilton") stars in a musical adaptation of the 2001 film, by Craig Lucas, Daniel Messé, and Nathan Tysen, about a young woman who spreads joy in Montmartre. (*Walter Kerr*, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Anastasia

Darko Tresnjak directs this new musical, by Terrence McNally, Stephen Flaherty, and Lynn Ahrens, drawn from the 1956 and 1997 films about the Russian Grand Duchess. (*Broadhurst*, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin March 23.)

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Christian Borle plays Willy Wonka in this musical version of the Roald Dahl book, featuring new songs by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman and a book by David Greig. (*Lunt-Fontanne*, 205 W. 46th St. 877-250-2929. Previews begin March 28.)

Daniel's Husband

Primary Stages presents a new play by Michael McKeever, directed by Joe Brancato, about a seemingly happy gay couple who disagree about whether to get married. (*Cherry Lane*, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111. In previews.)

Gently Down the Stream

In Martin Sherman's new play, set at the beginning of the online-dating era, Harvey Fierstein plays a gay pianist living in London who meets a younger man. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. In previews.)

Groundhog Day

Tim Minchin and Danny Rubin wrote this musical version of the 1993 Bill Murray comedy, about a misanthropic weatherman (Andy Karl) forced to repeat the same day over and over. Matthew Warchus directs. (*August Wilson*, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Hello, Dolly!

Bette Midler stars as the turn-of-the-century matchmaker Dolly Levi in the Jerry Herman musical from 1964, directed by Jerry Zaks and featuring David Hyde Pierce. (*Shubert*, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Latin History for Morons

In his new comic monologue, John Leguizamo surveys history from the Aztec Empire through the Revolutionary War in an attempt to find a hero for his son's school project. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. In previews. Opens March 27.)

Miss Saigon

Cameron Mackintosh remounts the 1989 mega-musical, by Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil, and Richard Maltby, Jr., an update of "Madame Butterfly" set during the Vietnam War. (*Broadway Theatre*, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. In previews. Opens March 23.)

The New Yorkers

Encores! presents Cole Porter's 1930 musical about speakeasies, gangsters, and dames in Prohibition-era New York, based on a story by E. Ray Goetz and the *New Yorker* cartoonist Peter Arno. (*City Center*, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. March 22–26.)

Oslo

A Broadway transfer of J. T. Rogers's play, directed by Bartlett Sher, which explores how a Norwegian

diplomat (Jennifer Ehle) and her husband (Jefferson Mays) secretly helped orchestrate the 1993 Oslo Accords. (*Vivian Beaumont*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. *Previews begin March 23.*)

The Play That Goes Wrong

England's Mischief Theatre imports this backstage comedy, about a hapless drama society whose production of a nineteen-twenties murder mystery descends into chaos. (*Lyceum*, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Present Laughter

Kevin Kline plays a narcissistic actor having a midlife crisis, in Moritz von Stuelpnagel's revival of the 1939 Noël Coward comedy. (*St. James*, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

The Profane

Zayd Dohrn's play, directed by Kip Fagan, is about a liberal immigrant Manhattanite whose daughter falls in love with the son of conservative Muslim parents. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. *In previews.*)

Sweat

Lynn Nottage's drama, in which a group of factory workers in Reading, Pennsylvania, find themselves at odds amid layoffs and pickets, transfers from the Public under the direction of Kate Whoriskey. (*Studio 54*, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews. Opens March 26.*)

Vanity Fair

The Pearl stages the William Makepeace Thackeray novel anatomizing nineteenth-century British society, adapted by Kate Hamill and directed by Eric Tucker. (*Pearl*, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-563-9261. *Previews begin March 24.*)

NOW PLAYING

Come from Away

Canadian hospitality doesn't seem like grist for drama, but this gem of a musical, by Irene Sankoff and David Hein, makes kindness sing and soar. On 9/11, thousands of airline passengers were rerouted to the tiny Newfoundland town of Gander, population nine thousand. The Ganderites opened their doors—and fetched sandwiches, underwear, and kosher meals—while the “plane people,” trapped in a five-day limbo, reckoned with a changed world. A splendid twelve-person cast plays dozens of characters, but Sankoff and Hein deftly spotlight a few, including an American Airlines pilot (Jenn Colella) trying to maintain control of her charges and an Egyptian chef (Caesar Samayoa) coping with the first glimmers of post-9/11 Islamophobia. Christopher Ashley's production doesn't dwell on inspirational messaging, instead letting the story, along with some fine fiddle playing, put the wind in its sails. (*Schoenfeld*, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Emperor Jones

It would be all too easy to present the opening scene of Eugene O'Neill's nightmarish 1920 drama—about a con-artist braggart who ascends to ultimate power on a wave of lies—as an allegory for the rise of Trump, or the rest of the play as a premonition of the final hours of Saddam Hussein or Muammar Qaddafi. But this revival, directed by Ciarán O'Reilly, isn't that kind of reboot, nor does it attempt to reconfigure the play's uncomfortable racial dynamics (although, mercifully, it does soften O'Neill's “Negro” dialect). Instead, it plunges headlong into O'Neill's own often vexing

vision, presenting an unavoidably important American drama that retains the power to spellbind and unnerve. Obi Abili, in the supremely challenging role of Brutus Jones, rules the show with a ruthless charm and retains a crucial psychological authenticity, no matter how histrionic the hallucinations. (*Irish Repertory*, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

The Gravedigger's Lullaby

Baylen (Ted Koch) and Margot (KK Moggie) are a young couple with a nearly inconsolable baby girl, trying to survive in a miserable, vaguely Depression-era shack on the outskirts of town. Along with his friend Gizzer (Todd Lawson), Baylen is a digger of “holes,” as he puts it, and he's a decent man stretched to the breaking point. Into the cemetery comes Charles (Jeremy Beck), the son of one of the town's richest men, looking for a plot for his father. Amid scenes touching on morality, economics, partnership, and gender roles, Jeff Talbott's play, from the Actors Company Theatre, goes from grim to grimmer, with a plot twist that disingenuously flirts with tragedy. The director, Jenn Thompson, and her cast give believable muscle to scenes involving physical labor, macho horseplay, sex, and violence, but the play, after a promising start, devolves into melodrama. (*Beckett*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

Joan of Arc: Into the Fire

This biographical musical about the quintessential Catholic martyr-saint comes equipped with the words, songs, and pedigree of David Byrne, but the result scans oddly like a straightforward French-nationalist religious pageant, albeit with a superior calibre of chord changes and stagecraft. (The director is Alex Timbers, who also collaborated with Byrne on “Here Lies Love.”) It's a fair guess that Joan's story has something to tell us from across the centuries, but such insights are almost entirely missing here. Byrne's libretto is persistently literal, pedestrian, and predictable, which is a mystery coming from a songwriter who has composed so many surprising, original, and wonderfully ambiguous lyrics over the decades. The show's saving grace is Jo Lampert, whose soulful voice and natural air of youthful fervor are a perfect match for Joan, and who is worth watching in anything. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

The Light Years

Some plays use stage magic as a storytelling tool; this show is about stage magic itself, seen here as an expression of a very American enthusiasm for a brighter, shinier future—even when harsh economic realities get in the way of dreams. As befits a piece by the New York company the Debate Society (“Jacuzzi”), “The Light Years” is wonderfully eccentric, toggling between the Chicago World's Fairs of 1893 and 1933. The focus is on worker bees—an electrician (Erik Lochtefeld), a jingle writer (Ken Barnett)—but casting a long shadow is Steele MacKaye (Rocco Sisto), a real-life theatre demiurge who dreamed of building a twelve-thousand-seat venue, the Spectatorium, for the 1893 event. Tying it all together is Aya Cash (from the TV show “You're the Worst”), who appears in both time lines and whose dry wit and classic, tender elegance recall Irene Dunne's. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

The Moors

Homage, lampoon, and queer subversion, Jen Silverman's play skulks in and out of a gloomy mansion smack in the middle of Brontë land. In this Playwrights Realm production, Linda Powell and Birgit Huppuch play Agatha and Huldrey, two spinster sisters encircled by dark plots and licorice all-

sorts. Silverman further populates her wuthering heights with a winsome governess (Chasten Harmon), a typhoid maid (Hannah Cabell), a talking moorhen (Teresa Avia Lim), and a glum mastiff (Andrew Garman). “Sometimes I think, Who would I be if I weren't depressed?” the dog says. The script is a knowing Gothic riff, but Mike Donahue's heavy-footed direction, which keeps pausing to re-fog the stage, overemphasizes its archness, rendering this playfully macabre pastiche strangely leaden. The terrific exception: Huppuch, as the younger spinster, performing what begins as a folksy murder ballad and devolves into a wild, blood-spattered punk snarl. (*The Duke on 42nd Street*, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. *Through March 25.*)

Sundown, Yellow Moon

Technically, little happens in Rachel Bonds's quiet new play, yet the show, co-presented by WP Theatre and Ars Nova, works a sneaky charm. Twin sisters spend some time visiting their father (Peter Friedman), who got into trouble at the school where he teaches. He's not the only one at a crossroads: the overachieving Joey (Eboni Booth) only appears to know where she's going and is ready to be distracted, while Ray (Lilli Cooper) is still trying to find herself, confused by a fraught affair and ambivalent about being a musician. The director Anne Kauffman and her actors tease out all the nuances in Bonds's script in an accomplished production (the sound and lighting are especially impressive), and the perfectly integrated songs, by the Bengsons, add an element of indie-pop melancholy. But be wary of tranquil waters—they can suck you in. (*McGinn/Cazale*, 2162 Broadway, at 76th St. 866-811-4111.)

The View Upstairs

When Wes (Jeremy Pope), a clueless, black, gay millennial on his way to becoming a “household name,” comes to inspect the building he's just bought for his fledgling fashion business, he finds himself temporarily transported back in time, “Brigadoon” style, to a tacky gay bar in 1973. It's occupied by a colorful crew of old-school queens, including a young hustler in formfitting polyester pants (Taylor Frey), with whom Wes falls in love. At first, Wes condescends to his new friends, who still cower around cops and have unprotected sex, but by the end of the evening he realizes that “likes” are no substitute for flesh-and-blood community. Max Vernon's compact musical could have been all fun and camp, but, under Scott Ebersold's direction, it's more thoughtful than that, with sad, beautiful love songs performed by a soulful ensemble cast. (*Lynn Redgrave*, 45 Bleecker St. 866-811-4111.)

ALSO NOTABLE

All the Fine Boys Pershing Square Signature Center. *Through March 26.* **Bull in a China Shop** Claire Tow. **C. S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert** Acorn. **Dear Evan Hansen** Music Box. **887** BAM Harvey Theatre. *Through March 26.* **The Glass Menagerie** Belasco. **How to Transcend a Happy Marriage** Mitzi E. Newhouse. **If I Forget** Laura Pels. **Linda City Center Stage I. Man from Nebraska** Second Stage. *Through March 26.* **946: The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips** St. Ann's Warehouse. **The Outer Space** Joe's Pub. **The Price** American Airlines Theatre. **Significant Other** Booth. **Sunday in the Park with George** Hudson. **Sunset Boulevard** Palace. **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Barrow Street Theatre. **Wakey, Wakey** Pershing Square Signature Center. **War Paint** Nederlander.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

The star of the Met's current revival of Mozart's music drama **"Idomeneo"** is the orchestra itself, from which James Levine, in fine form, summons beautifully round and resonant sound, communicating a wide range of emotions. The singers are more or less fitted into the orchestral fabric, but they, too, find moments to shine: Matthew Polenzani's Idomeneo delivers a rousing "Fuor del Mar"; Alice Coote's Idamante, a dramatic "Il Padre Adorato"; Nadine Sierra's Ilia, a beautifully sculpted "Zeffiretti Lusinghieri"; and Elza van den Heever's screwball villainess, Elettra, a vivid "D'Oreste, d'Ajace." (This is the final performance.) *March 25 at 1.* Sonya Yoncheva put her definitive mark on the title role of Verdi's **"La Traviata"** this season, but now it's the turn of the up-and-coming Italian soprano Carmen Giannattasio, who joins the revival's established stars, Michael Fabiano (as Alfredo) and Thomas Hampson (Germet). Nicola Luisotti conducts. *March 22 at 7:30 and March 25 at 8:30.* Sonja Frisell's grand production of Verdi's **"Aida"** is not exactly a shrinking violet on the Met's schedule. It returns with two estimable singers, Krassimira Stoyanova and Violeta Urmana, as Aida and her nemesis, Amneris, and a newcomer tenor, Jorge de León, as Radamès; Daniele Rustioni. *March 23 and March 27 at 7:30.* Much like Beethoven's symphonies, the composer's only opera, **"Fidelio,"** makes its points in dense and eloquent musical arguments. Fortunately, the Met's two leads, Adrienne Pieczonka and Klaus Florian Vogt, are Wagnerians known for carrying power as well as lyricism, and they head a cast that also includes Greer Grimsley and Falk Struckmann; Sebastian Weigle. *March 24 and March 28 at 7:30.* (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

LoftOpera: "Otello"

Verdi's interpretation of Shakespeare's tale of the Moor of Venice would be beyond this upstart company's range, but Rossini's lighter, bel-canto version should be a better fit. John de los Santos has set the opera in the time of Italy's postwar "economic miracle"; Sean Kelly conducts a cast headed by Bernard Holcomb and Cecilia Violeta López. *March 23, March 25, and March 27 at 8.* These are the final performances. (LightSpace Studios, 1115 Flushing Ave., Brooklyn. loftopera.com.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Bach's "St. John Passion"

The shorter and more sharp-edged of Bach's Eastertide masterworks is presented by two top-notch groups this week. The home-town chorus is TENET, an early-music ensemble of distinction, which teams up with the period instrumentalists of the Sebastians; Aaron Sheehan sings the role of the Evangelist, and Mischa Bouvier is Jesus. *March 23 and March 25 at 7.* (German Lutheran Church of St. Paul, 315 W. 22nd St. tenet.nyc.) Those seeking a lighter and more past-telled type of sound can take in a performance from the Choir of New College, Oxford, a renowned men-and-boys ensemble in the Anglican tradition. Robert Quinney conducts. *March*

28 at 7:30. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 51st St. mmpaf.org.)

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin

This scintillating German early-music ensemble, in a program titled "Foreign Affairs: Characters of the Baroque," conjures a vision of European union circa the eighteenth century, when continental composers including Telemann, Handel, Bach, Vivaldi, and Rebel found common ground in dance-music forms and virtuoso display. *March 23 at 7:30.* (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.)

American Composers Orchestra

A watershed work in terms of technique, content, and identity—and simply a thrilling piece—Steve Reich's "Tehillim," a group of Psalm settings, is the anchor of a program celebrating the composer's eightieth-birthday season. Sharing the bill are new commissioned works by the gifted younger composers David Hertzberg, Paola Prestini, and Trevor Weston. *March 24 at 7:30.* (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.)

Music Mondays Series: "Last Words"

Ekmeles, a chamber choir that devotes itself to the most challenging of contemporary works, offers David Lang's Pulitzer Prize-winning "Little Match Girl Passion," in a capacious concert that also features powerful pieces by Wolfgang Rihm ("Sieben Passions-Texte") and the great Schütz (including excerpts from the "St. Matthew Passion"). Also on hand is the Attacca Quartet, performing selections from the string-quartet version of Haydn's "Seven Last Words of Christ." *March 27 at 7:30.* (Advent Lutheran Church, Broadway at 93rd St. No tickets required.)

RECITALS

Miah Persson and Florian Boesch

The year 1840 is known as Robert Schumann's *Liederjahr* ("year of song"), since it saw the composition of so many of his best-loved vocal works, including the "Eichendorff Liederkreis," Op. 39, and "Frauenliebe und -leben." The glossy-voiced soprano and the eloquent baritone focus on selections from both of these works in their all-Schumann recital, with some later songs added into the mix. The lively collaborative pianist Malcolm Martineau accompanies them. *March 22 at 7:30.* (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.)

"Air Schoenberg: Connecting Flights"

In New York, Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2 in F-Sharp Minor, a gorgeously lyrical work in which late Romanticism and modernism miraculously coexist, has become one of the great unperformed pieces. International Street Cannibals, a gamely titled new-music ensemble, gives it a well-deserved hearing, collaborating with the soprano Ariadne Greif; also included on the enticing program are chamber and vocal works by Arvo Pärt ("Fratres"), Zemlinsky, Berg, Webern, Schubert, and Brahms. *March 22 at 7:30.* (St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, 131 E. 10th St. Tickets at the door.)

Matthew Rose

For his New York recital debut, the British bass showcases his penchant for the dramatic with three

unusual yet compelling set pieces: Britten's adaptations of Purcell's "Job's Curse" and "Let the Dreadful Engines of Eternal Will," and a nineteenth-century ballad by Carl Loewe. Rose and his pianist, Vlad Ifinca, then pivot to more traditional fare, closing with Schubert's final, masterly song cycle, "Schwanengesang." *March 25 at 7:30.* (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800.)

Orlando Consort: "Rediscovering Compère"

Loyset Compère is a name that often pops up on early-music programs to add a dash of variety to the proceedings, but the prestigious male vocal quartet turns that formula on its head in a concert presented by Miller Theatre. A sequence of fourteen of Compère's spirited chansons and more sombre sacred settings is contrasted with a pair of entries from his more famous peer Josquin and his predecessor Dufay. *March 25 at 8.* (150 W. 83rd St. 212-854-7799.)

Rafał Blechacz

The much honored Polish pianist, a brilliant technician with an inquisitive touch, makes his 92nd Street Y debut after previously storming Zankel Hall. Music by Chopin (including the Sonata No. 2 in B-Flat Minor) is of course on the program, complemented by works by Bach (Four Duets, BWV 802-805) and Beethoven. *March 26 at 3.* (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 92y.org.)

Music at the Frick Collection:

Christopher Purves

The forceful baritone, who made an indelible impression in George Benjamin's opera "Written on Skin," at Lincoln Center in 2015, comes to the museum's graciously gilded music room to sing a pair of Handel arias as well as serious songs by Schubert and Mussorgsky ("Songs and Dances of Death") and lighter fare by Gerald Finzi. *March 26 at 5.* (1 E. 70th St. 212-547-0715.)

National Sawdust: "Harold Meltzer @ 50"

One of the broad-minded music club's classical highlights this week is a tribute to the distinctive American composer, known for the limpid delicacy of his style. A superb group of musicians (including the mezzo-soprano Abigail Fischer, the Cygnus Ensemble, and the Boston Chamber Music Society) gather to perform the New York premieres of the Piano Quartet and of "Variations on a Summer Day," a spacious cycle of Wallace Stevens settings. *March 26 at 7.* (80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)

"Morton Feldman: The Late Piano Works"

Spectrum, the very intimate venue on the Lower East Side, is devoting a sequence of concerts to music by the revered proto-minimalist, an architect of luminously quiet musical landscapes. Nils Vigeland offers the last installment, which features "Piano" (1977) and "Palais de Mari" (1986). *March 26 at 7.* (121 Ludlow St., 2nd Floor. Tickets at the door.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: "Parisian Tableau"

The Society, highlighting the French tendency to write chamber music for violin with soloistic flair, presents an array of works, centered on the violinist Yura Lee's performance, with the pianist (and Society co-director) Wu Han, of Ravel's bravura "gypsy"-style showpiece, "Tzigane." Other composers on the program include Leclair, Françaix (his Trio for Violin, Viola, and Cello), and Chausson (his luxuriant Concert in D Major for Violin, Piano, and String Quartet, led by the dexterous violinist Arnaud Sussmann). *March 28 at 7:30.* (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Downtown Boys

Firing out of the basements and loft parties of Providence, Rhode Island, this bilingual group slugs through brawny no-wave shows with little concern for personal safety or noise-induced hearing loss. Its brash vocalist, Victoria Ruiz, is committed to left-wing causes; she's worked for the public defender's office, she sings in both English and Spanish, "to speak to as many people as possible," and she titled the band's debut album "Full Communism." This week, Downtown Boys appear alongside Alice Bag, a predecessor to Ruiz who must be happy to see the Boys flourish; her own group, the Bags, was part of the formative late-seventies generation of Los Angeles punk, and she continues to be a precious voice of dissent in her subversive solo work. (*Baby's All Right*, 146 Broadway, Brooklyn. 718-599-5800. March 24.)

Iron Chic

Iron Chic is a modest outfit, in keeping with the attitude of its adopted home town of Long Island. The band members describe themselves as "decent," the songs they play as "acceptable," and their genre as "punk," but their music bears all the marks of a sincere emo band without the youthful fluff. "The Constant One," Iron Chic's most recent album, and only its second, from 2013, begins with "Bogus Journey," a sad, tuneful, and lovely song about the daunting scale of the universe and our shrinking presence within it: "One hundred million miles of space, the right time and the perfect place." The band's next effort will be released on Side One Dummy, a launch-

ing label for melodic punk that appeals to people past their teens. (*Union Pool*, 484 Union Ave., Brooklyn. 718-609-0484. March 24.)

Moor Mother

Camae Ayewa—a poet, vocalist, and masterly sound collager—performs confrontational music under the moniker Moor Mother. During her days in the Philadelphia underground, in the early aughts, Ayewa recorded hundreds of unpolished self-released songs, and performed in local venues where she booked shows for other acts. She describes her material as a mixture of "low-fi, dark rap, chill step, blk girl blues, witch rap, coffee shop riot gurl songs, southern girl dittys and black ghost songs," and has focussed on both interrogating and becoming a vehicle for truth. This is evident in the dense industrial compositions of "Fetish Bones," an album she made using analog noise machines and field recordings. She performs alongside the composer **Rabit** and the sound artist **GENG**. (*Sunnyvale*, 1031 Grand St., Brooklyn. 347-987-3971. March 25.)

Mykki Blanco

Michael Quattlebaum, Jr., was early to alt-hip-hop—he's been making waves with his non-gendered take on rap's hypermasculine aesthetics since 2010. His work with rising electronic producers has received more play at underground raves than it ever would on mainstream radio: "What the fuck I gotta prove to a room full of dudes / who ain't listening to my words 'cause they staring at my shoes?" he raps on "Wavvy," from 2012. Quattlebaum briefly attended both the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Parsons School of Design, and his videos and stage shows maintain an art-school exhibitionism. The line between the personal and the public was blurred further when, in June of 2015, he revealed, via Facebook, that he'd been H.I.V. positive since 2011. The

revelation has only drawn fans closer to the fringe icon, who performs alongside **Cakes da Killa**. (*Bowery Ballroom*, 6 Delancey St. 212-260-4700. March 26.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Stanley Cowell

Cowell was a whirlwind of activity in the nineteen-seventies and eighties, sharing his encyclopedic piano skills with a host of top-tier artists as well as showcasing them on his own fine recordings, co-founding the influential Strata-East label, participating in jazz-repository projects, and generally playing his part as a sparkplug of post-bop jazz. Academia claimed him in the subsequent decades; lately, following his retirement, in 2013, he's been resurfacing for occasional welcome appearances. The still scintillating virtuoso leads a quintet featuring the saxophonist Bruce Williams. (*Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola*, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. March 23.)

Victor Goines Quartet

A proud scion of New Orleans who holds fast to his roots, Goines may be best recognized as a saxophonist and clarinetist with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. The Big Easy and its enduring musical charms will not be far from his mind during this three-night gig, for which he shares the stage with the effervescent banjo player and singer **Don Vappie**. (*Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola*, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. March 24-26.)

The Jazz Passengers

One of the essential groups to emerge from the nineteen-eighties East Village scene, the Jazz Passengers celebrate their thirtieth anniversary with the release of a bighearted, satirical new record, "Still Life with Trouble." The band's origins can be traced to the pit of the Big Apple Circus, where its founders, the saxophonist **Roy Nathanson** and the trombonist **Curtis Fowlkes**, forged a lifelong friendship and a musical collaboration that soon led to a stint with their like-minded downtown predecessors the Lounge Lizards. The Passengers' new album, like its previous efforts, is marked by a central contrast: breezy, comic vocals mingling with beautiful, unpredictable melodies and abstract harmonies that suggest an underlying seriousness. This show features most of the stellar original band members, including **Bill Ware**, on vibraphone, and **E. J. Rodriguez**, on drums and percussion, but the core of the group's sound is still the warm interplay between Nathanson's frenzied sax solos and Fowlkes's groove-filled trombone lines. (*Roulette*, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 917-267-0363. March 28.)

Bucky Pizzarelli

The dean of mainstream jazz guitar turned ninety-one at the beginning of the year, which means that his dulcet tones and perfectly turned phrases have filled the air for more than seven decades. Supported by his second guitarist and frequent partner **Ed Laub**, Pizzarelli will demonstrate undiminished flair on his trademark seven-stringed instrument. (*Jazz at Kitano*, 66 Park Ave., at 38th St. 212-885-7119. March 24.)

Renee Rosnes

On the gifted pianist's recent album, "Written in the Rocks," composition assumes equal importance with instrumental invention. After paying initial dues with such monumental modernists as Wayne Shorter and Joe Henderson, Rosnes has stepped firmly into the role of assured bandleader. She's joined by key collaborators, including the vibraphonist **Steve Nelson**, the bassist **Peter Washington**, and the drummer **Lewis Nash**. (*Smoke*, 2751 Broadway, between 105th and 106th Sts. 212-864-6662. March 24-26.)



The Jazz Passengers, a post-bop gang of music-class clowns, were East Village darlings in the nineteen-eighties. Three decades after the group's debut, it gathers at Roulette with a new album.

DANCE



David Gordon in a performance of "Trio A with Flags," at Judson Memorial Church in 1970.

Naked Flag Dance

Stephen Petronio revives Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A with Flags."

IN THE NINETEEN-SIXTIES, a number of downtown choreographers found themselves weary of the emotionalism of modern dance: all those women flinging themselves around in great swaths of fabric and looking tragic. The leading proponent of this position, or the one who immortalized it, was Yvonne Rainer, a founding member of the Judson Dance Theatre and Grand Union collectives. In 1966, Rainer premiered a dance called "Trio A," which attempted to dispense

with expression altogether. It did not depict anything; it did not narrate anything. All it was, or hoped to be, was a series of movements. (Now we kneel, now we hop, now we stick our chins out, etc.) Nothing developed into anything else. Above all, nothing was given more emphasis than anything else.

Of course, in the end, the piece, by refusing to express anything, came off as extremely expressive—of an anti-expressionist position. Never mind. It had a nice, cleansing effect on the field, and thereby helped modern dance become postmodern dance. Indeed, it was a sort of theme song of that transition. First done as a trio (by

Rainer and her colleagues David Gordon and Steve Paxton), it was later given as a solo, as a duet, as a group piece. Originally, it was performed to Wilson Pickett's "In the Midnight Hour." On some later occasions, it had a spoken text. Often it was danced in silence.

The dancers usually wore street clothes, but that could vary, too. In 1966, Stephen Radich, a New York gallery owner, exhibited some works that used the American flag in ways that condemned the Vietnam War. (In one, the flag, stuffed to resemble a penis, was hung on a seven-foot cross.) Radich was arrested and eventually convicted of desecrating the flag. In protest, a People's Flag Show was organized in Greenwich Village, in 1970. Rainer contributed what she called "Trio A with Flags," in which she and five other dancers performed the now famous piece wearing nothing but five-foot-long U.S. flags, tied to their necks like lobster bibs.

Radich's conviction was ultimately thrown out, but the history of "Trio A with Flags" did not end there. In 2015, the choreographer Stephen Petronio launched his company's "Bloodlines" project, whereby his shows would include dances not just by him but also by his postmodern predecessors. This year, for his company's season, March 28–April 2, at the Joyce, he will feature works by Steve Paxton, Anna Halprin, and also Rainer, including "Trio A with Flags." Asked why he chose the flag piece, Petronio answered that he made the decision months ago, to celebrate what he was sure would be Hillary Clinton's election as President. "Then," he said, "the world changed." Once it did, he figured, as Rainer had a half century before, that "Trio A with Flags" would make a nice act of defiance. The flag-clad version is actually not a good way to see the choreography of "Trio A." The flags block your view of the movement, and so does the nudity, because it's distracting. But the Petronio company will perform the five-minute dance twice in a row, first with flags, then with clothes (and Wilson Pickett).

—Joan Acocella

Hamburg Ballet / "Old Friends"

For the past forty-four years, the American-born choreographer John Neumeier has been the director of Hamburg Ballet, creating work in his highly emotive, theatrical style. (Many know him for his "Lady of the Camellias," which is in the repertoire at American Ballet Theatre.) For the company's first appearance at the Joyce—part of an American tour—it will perform "Old Friends," a compendium of intimate scenes from Neumeier's vast catalogue. It is set mostly to Chopin pieces, plus a Bach orchestral suite and several songs by Simon and Garfunkel. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 21-25.)

Paul Taylor American Modern Dance

In what may be a first, the company presents an evening of works by three titans of American modern dance: Taylor, Martha Graham, and Merce Cunningham. The Cunningham piece, "Summerspace," is performed by the Lyon Opera Ballet. The season also includes two new dances by the eighty-six-year-old Taylor, his hundred and forty-fifth and hundred and forty-sixth. One of them, "The Open Door," is set to Edward Elgar's "Enigma Variations"; the excellent Michael Novak is the central figure. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. March 21-26.)

"Juilliard Dances Repertory"

The conservatory, which supplies dancers to contemporary troupes around the world, offers an evening of works by well-established choreographers. The least known is "Sheer Bravado," from 2006, by the British modern-dance-maker Richard Alston, whose work combines a keen musicality with the exuberance of Paul Taylor. (It's set to Shostakovich's lively First Piano Concerto, played by Juilliard musicians.) "Por Vos Muero" (1996) combines Nacho Duato's earthy, grounded style with Spanish court music from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Mark Morris's "V," a luminous and occasionally devastating work, is set to Schumann's E-Flat Major Piano Quintet (also performed live). (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. 212-769-7406. March 22-25.)

Harkness Dance Festival / Jillian Peña

Peña borrows from basic ballet in a bid to expose its strangeness. She often uses multiplied video images and flatly recited text to express the desires and the dissatisfactions of selfhood. It's a method that can itself be dissatisfying, when the strangeness and desires turn out to be humdrum. She closes out this year's Harkness Dance Festival with the premiere of "The Natural Order," which plays with pop-culture ideas about witches and cult ideology. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 24-25.)

Che Malambo

When this all-male touring ensemble from Argentina made its local debut, at City Center's "Fall for Dance" sampler, in 2015, the response was wild whooping. Now it returns with a full show. Under the direction of the French choreographer Gilles Brinas, the troupe takes the drumming and percussive dancing traditions of South American cowboys and sexes them up: slicked hair, tight black pants. The presentation is a bit silly and the show is short on tonal variety, yet the speed of the swivelling footwork has a novel force, and the whirling of stones on the ends of lassos makes an undeniably strong impression. (Leon M. Goldstein Performing Arts Center, Kingsborough Community College, 2001 Oriental Blvd., Brooklyn. 718-368-5596. March 25.)

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Brooklyn Museum**"Georgia O'Keeffe: Living Modern"**

This eagerly anticipated exhibition makes a strong argument that the work of the great American modernist can be illuminated by a study of the singular persona she crafted—in particular, by a look at her remarkable wardrobe, from her collection of casually regal, Japanese-inspired robes to her black, bespoke men's suits. In novel, telling arrangements, O'Keeffe's striking early abstractions and radically blown-up renderings of flowers are installed alongside related garments. For example, three exquisite white blouses, hand-sewn by the artist, are shown against a dark wall with a glorious painting of canary-yellow autumn leaves, from 1928. Her subtle embroidery echoes the veined surfaces and serrated edges of the foliage. Photographs by her husband, Alfred Stieglitz, and a very long list of other famous photographers, demonstrate her commanding, androgynous bearing and bold ensembles, but this is where the proportions feel a bit off: with this parade of works by other artists, the image of O'Keeffe as an exacting aesthete is nearly overtaken by one of her as a model or muse. It makes you thirsty for more of her paintings, though there are some knockouts on view: of pink shells, animal skulls, otherworldly landscapes. These grand canvases put the show's vitrines of ballet flats and bandannas in proper perspective. Through July 23.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Alice Neel

An observant and expressive portraitist, the American artist spent most of her adult life in Spanish Harlem and Morningside Heights. This exhibition, lovingly curated by Hilton Als, a staff writer at this magazine, brings together two dozen stunning paintings of the artist's neighbors of color. "Julie and the Doll," from 1943, shows an intense brown-eyed young sitter in a teal dress, slouching as she cradles a rigid blond doll; the brushy tangerine, brown, and lavender background evokes a sunset as well as heavy drapes. Neel was an instinctual, exuberant colorist whose formal decisions lent her work a sibylline clarity. In the mustard-and-dark-green-dominated "Anselmo," from 1962, the self-conscious subject is tenderly rendered with the artist's hallmark outlining, a technique that grew bolder over the years. By the seventies, she amplified irregular facial features and sartorial quirks with even more aplomb, as in "Stephen Shepard," from 1978, which shows a very stylish young man, his face silhouetted in electric blue. Homogeneous, conventional subjects would have been death to Neel's curious, empathetic way of seeing. This show celebrates her refreshing, matter-of-fact inclusivity—and the value of an openhearted, uptown sensibility in general. Through April 22. (Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)



"Marsden Hartley's Maine," at the Met, surveys the modernist painter's relationship to his home state, through June 18. (Pictured: "The Ice Hole, Maine, 1908-09.")

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Sascha Braunig

Meticulous, delirious paintings by the young Maine-based phenom borrow tricks from Op art and Surrealism, while posing decidedly contemporary questions about the fate of the female form in virtual space. Braunig's world is neon-lit and barren but for warping grids and armatures of what look like high-tech alloys and silicone. In the painting on paper "Study for Tenterhooks," stretched coral-colored latex appears to shield a wire figure, her head flopping back on a folding neck. A leitmotif in these seductively bizarre works is a downcast female figure in profile, walking in low heels—she appears both illuminated by acid-yellow light and bathed in lurid red. The show includes one curious and compelling bronze sculpture: the talismanic wild card "Cuirasse," a voluptuous breastplate formed from what looks like wavy spaghetti. *Through April 2. (Foxy Production, 2 E. Broadway. 212-239-2758.)*

Jeremy Couillard

Inside a psychedelic living-room installation—complete with drawn shades, prints on the walls, and a coffee table furnished with a novel by Philip K. Dick and a bong—is an enormous projection of *Alien Afterlife*, a video game that the artist, a self-taught coder, designed. It begins with a hospital deathbed scene and continues on in strange landscapes charged with uncertain threats and suggestive gibberish. It's as fun as it is disconcerting. A hilariously over-the-top coda is installed in the gallery's basement: two life-size sculptures of aliens sitting at facing desks, communicating in a live chat room—you can join in at alienafterlife.com. *Through April 2. (Yours Mine & Ours, 54 Eldridge St. 646-912-9970.)*

Peter Halley

Sunny abstract gouaches from the late seventies bring to mind Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie-Woogie," Navajo blankets, or mosaics. Two works titled "A Japanese Woman Washing Her Hair" evoke both pixellation and the paintings of Jennifer Bartlett. Halley's real interest here isn't form as much as it is color—he treats each square as its own little painting, filling the center with curving brushstrokes and sometimes leaving the edges bare. One green square at the bottom corner of "Kaaba" is painted every which way: purple and yellow lines that radiate from it seem to shoot straight to heaven. *Through March 31. (Karma, 188 E. 2nd St. 212-390-8290.)*

Ragen Moss

Enter on the East Broadway side of the Apple Bank on Grand Street, on a weekend afternoon, and an attendant will lead you down to the basement, where eleven heartrending sculptures hang from two long poles. They are made from molded pieces of transparent plastic, which Moss partially paints and then joins to create sealed cocoons. "Consumptive Reader, 1st Degree (with Lemon)" sports blue plaid and contains a yellow balloon; "Vigilante (with Apple, with Pear)" features an orangish cross and two jagged squares marked out in black. The objects' shapes call to mind internal organs and suggest evidence of some mysterious trauma. *Through March 26. (Ramiken Crucible, 389 Grand St. 917-434-4245.)*

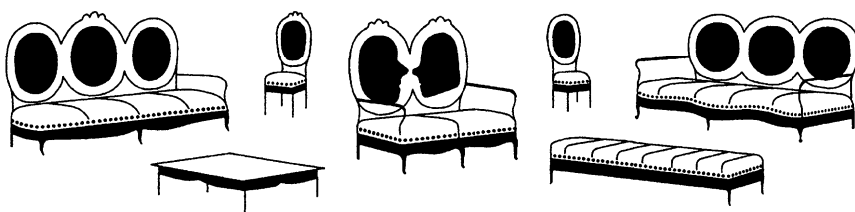
GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

"Do What I Want: Selections from the Arthur Russell Papers"

The genre-defying experimental musician and composer died young, from AIDS, in 1992, leaving behind a remarkable body of work that continues to earn him devotees. Russell, Iowa-born and trained as a cellist, thrived in the cross-pollinating underground scenes of New York in the seventies and eighties, producing both strangely spare disco tracks and languorous instrumentals influenced by Eastern music. He was also a ten-

der singer-songwriter with a pop streak he never quite managed to leverage. In addition to a cozy listening station, this small show includes correspondence, scores, scraps of lyrics, and charming photos, such as one, snapped by the artist's long-time partner, Tom Lee, of Russell sitting cross-legged, smiling, on a beach with a microphone, making a field recording. The assembled archival material offers a welcome glimpse into the inner workings of a mysterious and beloved figure, whose reserved demeanor belied his uninhibited creativity. *Through May 14. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)*

ABOVE & BEYOND

**Treasure in the Trash**

Mayor Bill de Blasio's Zero Waste initiative, also referred to as 0X30, commits New York City to contributing zero waste to landfills by the year 2030, including a plan to reduce commercial waste by ninety per cent. How seriously you take such a goal may depend on your definition of waste: Nelson Molina, a worker at the Department of Sanitation for the past three decades, has attempted to redefine the city's discarded objects as collectibles. An hour-long tour of Molina's findings is part of the city's "Getting to Zero" event series; his troves of rarities conjure an ethnographic flea market. Molina will be available to answer questions and help guide attendees through the mounds. *(M11 Garage, 343 E. 99th St. gettingtozero.nyc. March 26 at 11 A.M. and 1.)*

Macy's Flower Show

The annual two-week exhibition, at the Herald Square flagship store, is a welcome sign of the arrival of spring. It features ornate, aromatic displays of flora from around the country. This year's theme is "Carnival," with candied treats and flower displays fashioned after carny rides, as well as seminars and events focussing on twentieth-century American fairs. On March 26, the Flower Show pays homage to Coney Island, with art works and performances inspired by classic Brooklyn-beachfront attractions—stilt walkers included. *(Macy's Herald Square, 151 W. 34th St. 212-695-4400. March 26–April 1.)*

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

The Saatchi Gallery, a prominent contemporary-art space based in London's Chelsea, is selling off a hundred works from its collection—most from the past decade or so—at **Christie's**. The first half of this two-part,

transatlantic sale was held in London, a few weeks back; the New York portion takes place on March 22. Among the lots are a double portrait of an Etruscan statue—front and back—by Matt Lipps, called "Untitled (Double)," from 2011, and a carousel-like installation by the German artist Friedrich Kunath, "Untitled (Table/Lamps)." *(20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)*

READINGS AND TALKS

92nd Street Y

Dorothy (Dot) Padgett organized Jimmy Carter's Presidential campaign in 1975, the year she says the election was won "with pocket change and peanuts." Carter entered politics after farming peanuts in rural Georgia for most of his life, and famously beat Gerald Ford by a thin margin. At this talk, Padgett revisits various aspects of the transformative campaign—including her leadership of what would become known as the Peanut Brigade—and offers a multidimensional look at the role of current grassroots campaigning in American elections. *(Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 92y.org. March 23 at noon.)*

Pioneer Works

Jill Kroesen, a nineteen-seventies performance artist whose work examines the relationships between humans and institutions, appears as a motivational speaker for the "office retreat"—themed closing reception for "WORK," the art collective E.S.P. TV's first solo exhibition in the United States. The group created a six-week-long televisual installation, which broadcasts staged performances of staffers rearranging sets, grabbing coffee, and carrying out cubicle minutiae—the office vignettes are then transformed into stand-alone audiovisual shorts. *(159 Pioneer St., Brooklyn. pioneerworks.org. March 26 at 7.)*

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

Bunna Café

1084 Flushing Ave., Brooklyn
(347-295-2227)

THERE ARE SOME New York restaurants that you can mention in any social setting and someone will invariably nod and intone, sagely, “Oh, yes, I go there *all* the time.” Somewhat remarkably for a vegan Ethiopian spot—in Bushwick, no less—Bunna Café is one of them. What’s more, Bunna is well, and rightly, loved. It’s one of those vegan restaurants where the absence of meat and dairy isn’t obvious while you’re there, but when you venture out the door your step has a new spring in it.

The dining room at Bunna is dark, woody, filament-bulb-lit, and perennially almost full. Murmuring couples on dates provide backing vocals for out-of-towners visiting friends for the first time (“Brooklyn’s basically a big city, right?”), until a steel-drum band, say, strikes up a set, mixing Beatles covers with island rhythms. There may even be a coffee ceremony going on, with incense burning as demitasse cups are filled with pungent black liquid. At Bunna, which means “coffee” in Amharic, the ceremonial coffee is free.

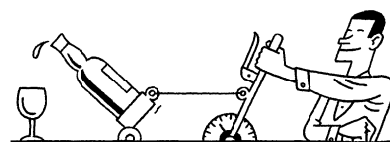
But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. You should first order cocktails. The best among these is the Melkam Maracuja, playfully sweet with rum, passion fruit,

and sage shrub, followed by the Ethiopian Ice Road Trucker, a crisp sunflower-milk shake spiked with stout and bourbon. Then, in preparation for the main course, wash your hands at the colorfully tiled basin at the back of the restaurant. Like all Ethiopian stews, Bunna’s should be scooped up using injera, a tart, bready pancake that is fermented for two days before it’s ready to eat (gluten-free injera is available, but you have to order it a day in advance). Injera is also used to make the *kategna*, in which a toasted, folded hunk of it is slathered with berbere; it’s excellent, if you like spicy food. Less strong, and more refreshing, is the *butecha selata*, a kale-and-red-onion salad mixed with a tangy paste made from turmeric, onion, pepper, and chickpea flour. Eat a bite, and, miraculously, you feel healthy.

The best thing to do is to go for one of the feasts (for two, three, or four). All of Bunna’s goodness is heaped on round platters of injera: from Ethiopian classics such as *misir wot* (stewed lentils) and *shiro* (silky split peas simmered in garlic and herbs) to innovations like *kedija selata*, a jumble of kale, jalapeño, and avocado sprinkled with lemon, as well as a rotating seasonal dish (at the moment, it’s stewed kabocha squash). As Bunna’s motto says, “Everything is *eshi*”—in other words, “It’s all good.” (Feast for two, \$30.)

—Nicolas Niarchos

BAR TAB



100 Fun

932 60th St., Brooklyn (718-436-8883)

At night, this karaoke emporium appears like a neon mirage on a quiet Borough Park street. The curved bar inside, bathed in lavender light, is practically galactic. Though the menu’s sugary cocktails, such as the Blue Hawaii and the fluorescent Pinky, are, as one patron put it, “very Dave & Buster’s,” they are perfectly adequate lubrication for crooning modern classics like Kanye’s “Heartless” or Rihanna’s “Work.” (Patrons seeking greater luxury will be glad to know that there is an extensive bottle-service list.) The establishment’s glitzy corridors are lined with private rooms, each lavishly decorated and equipped with a television, microphones, and drink service at the touch of a button. Wandering the hallways, one overhears a multitude of pitch-imperfect voices, ranging from breathy delight to bellowing sorrow. On a recent Monday, surrounded by the quilted pink walls of the Hello Kitty room, a group of karaoke veterans scrolled through a list of songs in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and English. Strobe lights flashed on the placid face of the patron pink-bowed cat, which beamed down from the ceiling. An artist who grew up in Hong Kong was delighted to stumble onto the Cantopop star Denise Ho. “She was my only queer icon growing up,” the reveller said, picking up a microphone to sing “千千万萬個我” (“Thousands of Me”). The other patrons, who had moved from cocktails to Bud Lights and Coronas, chattered over the music. But the solo quickly gained their rapt attention—setting down their drinks, they swayed their arms gently in time to the ballad.—Wei Tchou



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT EUROTRUMP

IS THERE ANYTHING typically German about you?" Donald Trump was asked in January, during an interview with European journalists about his immigrant forebears. He answered, "I like things done in an orderly manner. And, certainly, the Germans, that's something that they're rather well known for." As often with Trump's comments, it was hard to distinguish historical insensitivity from personal obliviousness—given the complete disorder of his Administration—and heedless stereotyping. (He added, in reference to his mother, who was born in Scotland, "The Scottish are known for watching their pennies. . . . I deal in big pennies.") When Trump talks about Europe, it tends to be as a land of his own imagining: a once terrific place brought low by NATO deadbeats and so wrecked by immigration-related disasters that no one wants to visit anymore; its discontent a harbinger of his success and proof of his perspicacity. Last week, however, the real Europe fell out of step with Trump.

On Wednesday, the Dutch held an election in which the center-right Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, was pitted against Geert Wilders, a right-wing extremist whose oddly constructed blond pompadour is the least baneful of his resemblances to Trump. Wilders had called for shutting mosques, banning the Koran, closing the Netherlands' borders to Muslims, and levying a tax on women who wear head scarves in public. Owing to the fragmented state of Dutch politics—twenty-eight parties were on the ballot—he had a shot at gaining a plurality, an outcome that would have given momentum to others on Europe's far right, including Marine Le Pen, who will face French voters in the Presidential election next month, as well as the German extremists who will challenge Chancellor Angela Merkel in the fall.

The fear was that, after a near-miss

in Austria, three months ago, the Continent was emulating Trump and reverting to its basest image of itself and of others. In fact, Europe's current populist-nationalist movements predate Trump's ascendance, and, at times, it isn't clear who is nurturing whom. Wilders, for example, was a featured speaker at a 2010 rally in New York, protesting the construction of a mosque near the World Trade Center site, and he has since written for Breitbart News. Representative Steve King, the Iowa Republican, was praising Wilders when he remarked, earlier this month, that Western civilization could not be saved by "somebody else's babies."

Two days before the Dutch election, in a televised debate, Wilders railed against the "liars" and the "givers-away" who "don't allow the Netherlands to be the Netherlands anymore." Rutte agreed that immigration was an issue, but charged that Wilders's proposals were "fake," and added, "That's the difference between tweeting from your couch and governing the country." That line, which dominated the next day's headlines, was one that Hillary Clinton might have used; in Rutte's case, it seems to have worked. With a record eighty-two-per-cent voter turnout, his party won thirty-three seats out of a hundred and fifty, leaving Wilders in second place, with twenty. Many young, first-time voters

supported the GreenLeft Party, which won fourteen seats—up from just four in the previous election—under the leadership of Jesse Klaver, who is thirty years old and exhorted crowds to stand by their principles.

The celebrations were tempered, though, by the way that Rutte had pandered to the right. One of his campaign ads told immigrants, "Be normal or get out," and he warned that, with Wilders, the "wrong kind of populism" would take hold, begging the question of what the right kind might be. This is a temptation that many European politicians share with



the leaders of the G.O.P.: how Trump-like are they willing to appear in the interest of winning over voters? In the event, Rutte's party did worse in this election than it did in the last one, and it will probably rely on insurgent pro-Europe leftist parties to form a coalition. François Fillon, France's center-right Presidential candidate, tried a tactic similar to Rutte's, only to be derailed by a classically French corruption scandal involving, among other things, expensive suits. If the polls hold, Emmanuel Macron, who is essentially running as an independent, will be the mainstream alternative to Le Pen in a runoff, in May. At a moment of partisan upheaval and realignment, the future is not likely to belong to those who do little more than triangulate.

Europe may also be taking note of the backlash in this country to Trump's xenophobic policies. On the same day that Wilders was defeated, a judge in Hawaii issued a temporary restraining order halting Trump's latest travel ban, on the ground that its legal language was simply a cover for discriminating against Muslims. Still, European anti-Trump sentiment possesses, as yet, a certain ideological incoherence. Last week, after Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, called for a new referendum on Scottish independence she took to Twitter to boast about the numerical superiority of her electoral mandate to that of Theresa May, the British Prime Minister. In response, Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Tory leader, tweeted, "Someone's

gone the full Donald Trump." It is May, though, who is leading Britain out of Europe—a process advanced by Parliament last week. More than a million Britons signed a petition berating her for inviting Trump for a state visit, which would entail the national mortification of seeing him presented to the Queen. (Sean Spicer's accusation, during a White House press briefing, that British spies had helped President Obama wiretap Trump didn't help matters.) But such gestures mean little in the absence of a clear European voice speaking out against what Trump stands for.

The closest the Continent has to that is Angela Merkel, who arrived in Washington last Friday. During the campaign, Trump said that Merkel, with her humane approach to refugees, was "ruining" her country, and that "the German people are going to end up overthrowing this woman." At a joint press conference, when a reporter asked Merkel what she thought of Trump's "style" she politely made a broader point: "People are different, people have different abilities, have different characteristics, traits of character, have different origins, have found their way to politics along different pathways—well, that is diversity, which is good." As she finished speaking, she turned and nodded at Trump, with a smile, trying, perhaps, to discern just what about him might be typically American.

—Amy Davidson

DEPT. OF HYPHENATES DR. GWYNETH WILL SEE YOU



LAST MONDAY, the actress turned life-style entrepreneur Gwyneth Paltrow summoned a small group of employees to her bright Santa Monica office. *Goop*, the weekly newsletter she founded nine years ago, has grown into an e-commerce empire, and she wanted to discuss the online marketing plan for the company's latest enterprise: pills. In 2014, sales of dietary supplements in the United States reached \$36.7 billion, so it makes sense that *Goop* would expand its stock of wellness wares (Ayurvedic *ashwagandha* powder; a vaginal-muscle-toning egg made of jade) to include vitamins.

One of the meeting's principal participants was Dr. Alejandro Junger, a Uruguayan cardiologist and one of the four doctors whose help Paltrow enlisted for her vitamin business. The two met in 2007, when, intensely fa-

tigued, Paltrow summoned Junger to a Manhattan hotel room to administer an intravenous dose of vitamins and minerals (B, C, and magnesium, among other ingredients) known in the trade as a Myers' Cocktail. Afterward, he prescribed a plan of pills and powders. "I was, like, 'If only everyone could have access to this!'" Paltrow recalled, smiling. She was wearing a short, poufy skirt, high-heeled booties, and chunky gold rings.

Talk turned to packaging, and Junger told his patient, "For you, I would put the pills in ziplock bags, remember?" *Goop's* vitamins have self-consciously quirky names (Why Am I So Effing Tired, High School Genes, Balls in the Air, the Mother Load) and come portioned out in color-coded packs.

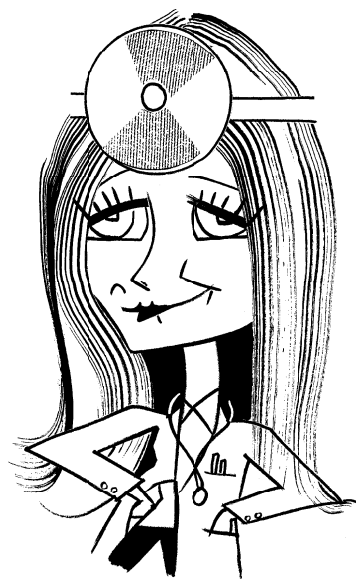
Elise Loehnen, *Goop's* head of content, who has a rumpled pixie cut and wore a black blazer over a white T-shirt, asked Junger if he would answer questions from supplement users on Facebook. She suggested that he write out answers in advance. "I don't expect you to hang out in our Facebook group," she said. "Unless you want to."

"I have no problem doing that for the first few months," Junger said.

"That's so nice. Really?" Paltrow said. She fished around in a pile of vials strewn on her desk, grabbed a brown tube of something, and swiped it across her lips.

They moved on to a mockup of a *Goop* newsletter, which included a title beside Paltrow's name: C.E.O.

"Have we discussed that?" Paltrow



Gwyneth Paltrow

asked, indicating her new position, which had not been announced.

"I think we just do it," Loehnen said.

Last year, *Goop* raised fifteen million dollars in venture capital and moved its headquarters from New York to Los Angeles, in the process losing its C.E.O., Lisa Gersh, the former C.E.O. of Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia.

At the prospect of revealing her new boardroom role, Paltrow groaned. "Ugh, you guys are giving me agita," she said. She banged her fists on her desk, rattling the vials, and pretended to pout.

"Can't this be your subtle coming-out party?" Loehnen asked.

"I guess so," Paltrow said. "I mean, the board did make me C.E.O. It wasn't my fault. It wasn't my decision."

Ashley Lewis, *Goop's* senior director of wellness, ran down a list of daily reminders that all vitamin buyers would receive as texts from "Nurse Kevin," a character based on Paltrow's spiky-haired assistant, Kevin Keating.

"The Kevin emoji right now, it's some weird bear," Paltrow said.

"His name is Nurse Kevin?" Junger asked.

While discussing the benefits of broccoli extract, Paltrow ripped open a small white packet and slurped down its contents: vitamin-C nanospheres, which purportedly reach the bloodstream faster than other forms. (She offered one to a visitor; it tasted like glue.) Lewis distributed printouts showing the supplements' packaging. "I really love the names," Paltrow said, gazing at a shot of the box for High School Genes (to boost metabolism).

"You know what *I* wish," Loehnen said, smirking.

"Do you know what Elise wanted to name High School Genes?" Paltrow asked, stifling a laugh. "The FUPA Blaster!" Junger looked puzzled.

"We sent it to the regulatory guy at the lab," Lewis said. "He goes, 'I'm a millennial, but what's a FUPA?'" (It's an acronym for a fat upper pubic area; some people substitute a different "P" word.)

Paltrow laughed. "These nanospheres are going to come out my nose."

Her cell phone rang. It was her

twelve-year-old daughter. "Hold on," she said, "Apple's panicking at Disneyland."

After she hung up, there was a conversation about the adrenal benefits of soaking in a bath of magnesium and about how the antioxidant glutathione is hard to absorb orally.

"What about sublingually?" Paltrow asked.

Junger said it was best administered intravenously. "But we can't sell those things," he said. "You can shoot yourself"—Paltrow mimed sticking a syringe into her behind—"but you can't buy injectable glutathione without a prescription."

"Right," Paltrow said. "I think mainlining vitamins might be going a bit far, even for us."

—Sheila Marikar

BROTHERHOOD OF MAN THE NEW BRUNCH



AMERICAN FOOD ACTIVISM was born in the seventeen-seventies, when the Boston Tea Party turned that town's harbor into a souchong-scented scene of rebellion. In 2003, the cafeteria in the U.S. House of Representatives, in a somewhat literal protest of France's position against the Iraq War, rechristened fried potatoes freedom fries. Last year, the Spanish-American chef José Andrés, offended by Trump's anti-Mexican rhetoric, pulled out of a restaurant deal with the candidate's new Washington, D.C., hotel. Trump's election has inspired dissent in a variety of spheres, the culinary among them. As Donna Lieberman, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, put it, "Protest is the new brunch."

The occasion for Lieberman's comment was a benefit dinner, last month, called "Breaking Bread," which featured the cuisines of the seven Muslim-majority countries designated in Trump's original travel ban—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. (Iraq has since been taken off the list.) More than a hundred peo-

ple paid a hundred and fifty dollars each to gather for a feast in a rented party space with views of the Hudson River.

Katie Crown, a British-born event planner, and Marissa Lippert, the owner of Nourish Kitchen + Table, in the West Village, organized the evening with friends, soliciting donations for most of the food and the furnishings. They wore T-shirts designed for the occasion, emblazoned with "Alepp" and a falling "o." Lippert rushed around, hugging people and checking on appetizers, which included sunchoke-and-feta phyllo purses, orange-hazelnut *labne*, spice-roasted beets with Sudanese *mish* sauce, and *za'atar*-sprinkled flatbread. A nutritionist and self-proclaimed food nerd, Lippert had devised the menu by researching the prized dishes of the seven countries and then figuring out how to approximate them, using a somewhat random store of donated ingredients that included a whole goat. Sure, carpaccio is an Italian dish, but there was some extra goat, and raw slices of the loin went well with *dukkah*, an Egyptian spice blend, and *zhoug*, a Yemeni condiment.

"Every time I get a push notification from the *Times* or CNN, my heart sinks," Crown said. "I'm an immigrant, and America welcomed me with open arms."

At the bar, Noor Ahmad, a young public defender for the Legal Aid Society, declined a Desert Rose Gin Fizz and picked up a glass of rosé. (All the banned countries, except Syria and Iraq, prohibit alcohol.) Ahmad, who is Palestinian-American, spoke of her Libyan-born mother, who was travelling abroad. "I'm panicked about her coming into J.F.K. and them looking at her passport," she said. "My immigration attorney says, 'You have every right to be panicked. Yes, she's a U.S. citizen, but these guys are thugs right now.'"

As guests took their seats and began eating Persian shaved-vegetable salads with orange-blossom citronette dressing, Lieberman gave a speech. "The bread would be tasty in any circumstance," she said. "But tonight it is especially tasty, because it's seasoned with a spirit of resistance to the hateful, harmful, and unlawful attacks on good

people and good cultures that have given so much to our country.”

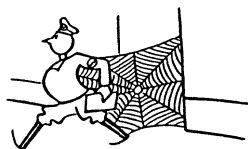
Over slow-roasted goat with Somali *bizbaz* sauce and Yemeni whey-braised lamb *fahsa*, a young man in a blazer spoke of other fund-raising dinners in the works. “Have you eaten at Yemen Café? They might do something with Roads & Kingdoms,” he said, referring to a new multicultural Web site.

The evening’s entertainment was East African retro-pop music, performed by a band called the Nubatoners. Alsarrah, the lead singer, wore jeans and a snakeskin-patterned vest over a silky peasant blouse. She talked about growing up in Sudan and Yemen and eventually landing in New York. The city, she said, was “like that lover that slaps you across the face but you keep crawling back.”

In a hallway, away from the music, Lieberman listed the events she had lined up for the next few days, and spoke of the political transformation of the upcoming generation. “A friend’s daughter went off to college this year, and she was feeling a little lost, but now she’s involved in a protest a minute,” she said. “When I was in college, in the sixties, political protest was a passion and a set of values, but it was also a set of friends. As guilty as I feel about leaving our kids in this pile of shit, they’re going to have a community of people who share their values, and I think that’s really nice.”

—Shauna Lyon

GONE TOMORROW/ DEPT. SPIDERWEB-MAN



EIGHT YEARS AGO, the artist Michael Anthony Simon, then thirty, was living in Chicago and feeling complacent, creatively. So he moved to South Korea. “I wanted to isolate myself, close the studio doors, see what happened,” he said the other day. What happened was that, after settling in the city of Gwangju, he found himself wandering out of the studio and into the woods, and painting on leaves and spiderwebs—canvases, of a kind. The only traces of these variegated apparitions, once the elements had done them in, were photographs. “This whole thing of making bronze statues to last five thousand years—if everyone did that, there’d be no space left,” Simon said.

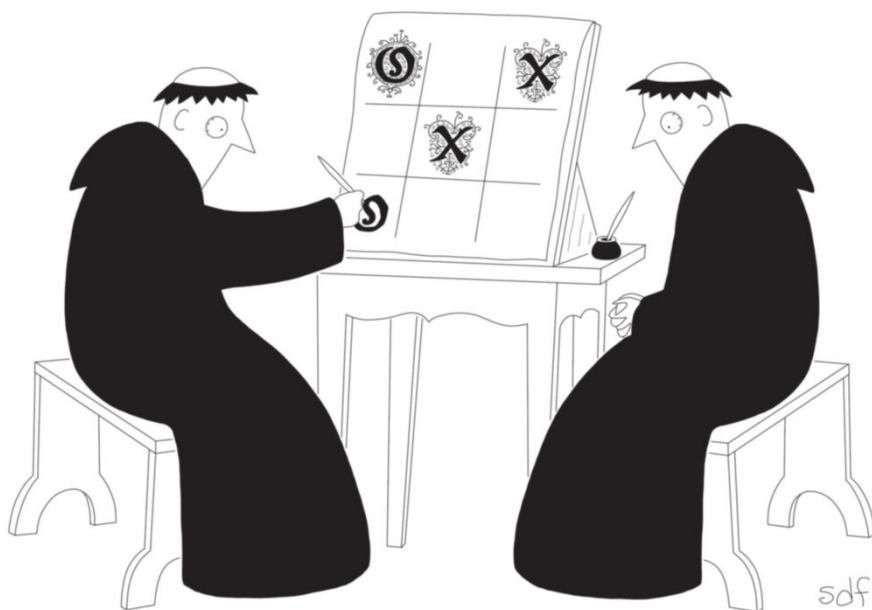
Still, he wanted to take his art inside. He began catching spiders and putting them to work in his studio. After experimenting with different species, he settled on the golden silk orb-weaver, known for its great circular webs. “I’d get them started, and then I’d leave for the night,” he said. He’d fabricated triangular pedestals with three acrylic rods rising vertically from the points. With a stick, he’d place a spider atop one of the rods, convey it to the next rod, and then to the third rod, and finally back to the first, to complete the triangle. After that, the spi-

der was on her own. (He employed only females.) “Some of them have personalities,” he said. “I’m not kidding. Some are, like, Where would you like this? Others are, like, Fuck you, I’m outta here.”

In the morning, he’d return to find elaborate new lattices. He gathered up the spiders and put them back where he’d found them, outside. Then he spray-painted the webs. Sometimes he left the painted webs attached to the rods—when they collapsed, maybe after a couple of years, he’d collect the detritus in a signed plastic baggie, or else he’d make collages with the fragments. Sometimes he removed the web paintings from the rods and hung them on the wall. “I like the ridiculous nature of the project,” he said.

Last spring, Simon, on a bender in Seoul, fell and banged his head. In the following days, his vision started to deteriorate. At first, it felt as if someone were turning up the lights, as if the world had been bleached. He began wearing sunglasses at night. Then he lost the ability to focus; though he could distinguish things on the periphery, the center of his vision, as it were, was gone. A blood test in September revealed that he had Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy, a condition caused by a rare genetic mutation. In just eight weeks, he’d become legally blind. Living in Korea was impractical. In October, he moved back to the U.S., to a basement apartment in his brother’s house, in the suburbs of Denver. He boxed and shipped twenty unpainted webs to Colorado, so that he could continue his spider work. His latest thing, though, is working without color. He has a new series of paintings of polar bears in blizzards.

He was in New York recently, to visit an exhibit of his old painted webs at Apex Art, a SoHo gallery. He stayed in Koreatown, and one snowy day went out searching for a pot of *kimchi-jjigae*, a spicy stew that suited the foul weather. Living in Asia had infected him with a sneaker fetish: he avoided puddles in order to protect his laceless Onitsuka Tigers. He had a black beard and, under a wool cap, a shaved head. He made eye contact—a vestigial reflex, perhaps—and had a beatific vibe. At a restaurant, he took photographs of the menu with his phone and enlarged them on the screen, which he then held inches from his nose. “One of the seven deadly sins this condition has helped me with is pride,” he said. He ordered in



Korean. Some young Asian women seated at the next table took note.

"This is the first time I've spoken Korean in four months," he said. "I learned to read and write Korean in three or four hours from YouTube. The actual speaking part is a different story." He was finding it almost as hard to adjust to living in the U.S. again as it was to get used to being legally blind. "I'm an independent guy, but I know I need help," he said. "I'm still figuring this out." As far as working is concerned, "it just takes longer. It's alleviated a lot of bullshit, because I can't see it!"

In his peripheral vision, he caught sight of something on the wall. A bug, yes. He smiled. Fruit fly.

—Nick Paumgarten

THE BOARDS PLANE PEOPLE



THE TOWN OF Gander, Newfoundland, has six traffic lights and a population of less than thirteen thousand. Snowmobiling is popular, and people leave their car doors unlocked while they're at the grocery store. Its distinguishing feature—and the reason it exists—is its airport, which opened in 1938 and was once the largest in the world, making Gander a crucial transatlantic refuelling stop in the days before long-range jet travel. On September 11, 2001, after flights were rerouted to their nearest airports, thirty-eight jets suddenly landed in Gander, stranding some seven thousand passengers for up to five days in a town with only five hundred hotel rooms.

"The first thing I did was declare a state of emergency," Claude Elliott, the Mayor of Gander since 1996, recalled the other day. A stout sixty-seven-year-old with salt-and-pepper eyebrows and a thick Newfoundland accent, Elliott was in New York with his wife and daughter for the opening of "Come from Away," a new Broadway musical recounting Gander's act of extreme hospitality. It was his third time in New York City. "Going out for breakfast, we were standing on the street corner and I told my wife, 'There's more people here this morning than what live in Gander,'" he said.

Elliott's mayoral duties typically include welcoming conventiongoers and negotiating local disputes, such as the school-bus drivers' strike that was in effect on 9/11. The arrival of the plane people, as the locals called them, nearly doubled the town's population. "I didn't go home for five days," Elliott, who is retiring as mayor in September, recalled. Elementary schools were converted into makeshift dormitories. Volunteers from the Salvation Army and the Red Cross made lunches, and the hockey rink became a walk-in refrigerator. Other logistical problems were trickier. "We ran out of underwear," Elliott said, so more was trucked in from St. John's, two hundred and seven miles away. The plane people hailed from ninety-five countries, including Zimbabwe; kosher meals were required, as was a place for Muslim passengers to pray. A town veterinarian took care of the animals in the planes' cargo holds, including two chimpanzees en route to the Columbus, Ohio, zoo. "A few years later, I got a letter from the Columbus Zoo and a picture of a baby chimpanzee, and they'd named it Gander," Elliott said.

By Day Two of the crisis, Elliott was at the Royal Canadian Legion Hall, initiating marooned passengers as honorary Newfoundlanders, in a ritual named "screeching in": visitors wear yellow sou'westers, eat hard bread and pickled bologna, kiss a cod on the lips, then drink the local rum, called screech, while on-lookers bang an "ugly stick" covered in beer-bottle caps. "We started off with seven thousand strangers," Elliott said, "but we finished with seven thousand family members."

In New York, the Mayor, wearing a tuxedo, reappeared in his hotel lobby in Times Square, along with fifteen other Newfoundlanders who had come down for opening night, including a town constable named Oswald Fudge. They had heard that Cindy Crawford was at the Saturday matinée. "She said she cried, she laughed, but it was the human kindness that really touched her," Elliott said.

The group walked to the Schoenfeld Theatre, while Elliott led them in a Newfoundland ditty called "Aunt Martha's Sheep." Outside the entrance was a press line, including reporters from *Playbill* and the BroadwayWorld Web site. Elliott went straight for the Canadian press, including camera crews from the local

CBC branch and Newfoundland's NTV.

"How does it feel today to be here on the red carpet?" an NTV reporter asked him.

"Like being a kid in a candy store!" Elliott said. "There are very friendly people here. People are waving to you, they say hello to you—almost the same as we do in Newfoundland."

He accompanied his family inside and sat in front of Beverley Bass, who was the first female captain at American Airlines and one of the pilots grounded in



Ivanka Trump and Justin Trudeau

2001. After the show, the actors invited their real-life counterparts onstage for a bow. "Something else to take off my bucket list," Elliott said. Walking out of the theatre, he told an N.Y.P.D. officer, "God bless you for your service," before leading the Ganderites onto a shuttle bus. On their way to the after-party, where screech cocktails and cod awaited, they broke into song again: "There's no place I would rather be than here in Newfoundland!"

"If we were onstage when they were doing the screeching, it would be the real stuff!" Elliott bellowed. The Newfoundlanders cheered.

"And the bottle of screech wouldn't be only half-empty!" someone behind him yelled.

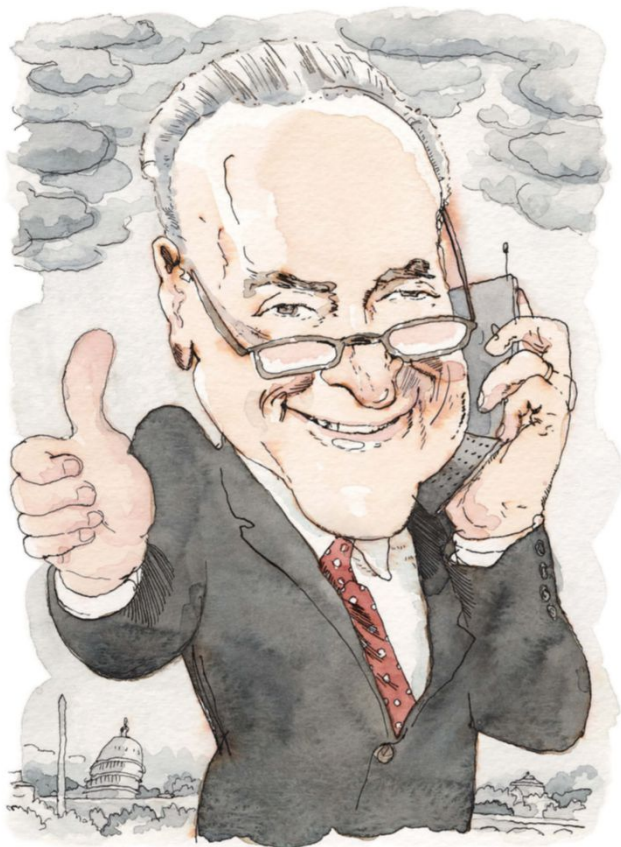
Three days later, the Mayor went back to watch the show alongside the Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, who had brought Ivanka Trump. Right before the lights went down, Elliott took a selfie with Trump. "I invited her to Gander," he said afterward. "And if she wants to become an honorary Newfoundlander, we will screech her in."

—Michael Schulman

MINORITY REPORT

Can Chuck Schumer check Trump?

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT



ON A MORNING not long after Michael Flynn, having lied about conversations with the Russian Ambassador, was forced to step down as national-security adviser, but before Jeff Sessions, having lied about conversations with the Russian Ambassador, was forced to recuse himself from any Justice Department investigation involving the Trump campaign, Chuck Schumer rose from his desk on the floor of the United States Senate to reflect on the state of the union.

"We are in a moment of profound unease about the stability of the executive branch of our government," he began. "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."

"I've been in Congress a long time

and I have never, ever seen anything like this," he went on. "At this juncture, we would all do well to remember that democracy, the most benevolent, desirable, effective, and just form of government devised by man, is also one of the most fragile systems of government devised by man. It requires constant vigilance."

Schumer was wearing a dark suit that sagged under the weight of the mike pinned to his lapel. His tie was askew. (*New York* once described Schumer, the state's senior senator, as a "zhlub, and in a good way.") He kept glancing down at his notes through a pair of half-glasses, so that the view from the press gallery, and also on C-SPAN, was mostly of his scalp.

Schumer continued, addressing no

one in particular, since the chamber was, as usual, nearly empty. "One of the things that the framers of the Constitution most worried about was the threat of foreign intervention in our government, what they called 'foreign intrigue,'" he said. "The reported contact between operatives in the Trump campaign and Russian intelligence officials is exactly the kind of intrigue that our founders sought to prohibit. I mention all of this because I believe the stakes to be very high."

When the 115th Congress convened, on January 3rd, Schumer became the Senate's Minority Leader. (He ascended to the post upon the retirement of Senator Harry Reid, of Nevada.) Two and a half weeks later, on Inauguration Day, Schumer became the country's highest-ranking Democrat. Neither position was what he had had in mind.

Throughout the campaign, Schumer had assumed that Hillary Clinton would be President. He further imagined that Democrats would pick up enough seats in the Senate to make him the Majority Leader. He would then help shape and enact the President's legislative agenda. He and Clinton were already considering what their priorities should be for the first months of her Administration.

The election results put an end to this happy dream. The power of the Senate minority is purely negative: it can't pass legislation; it can only block it. But even exercising negative power requires a great deal of discipline—potentially more than the Democrats can muster.

Next year, ten Democratic senators will be up for reelection in states that Trump carried. The President has been wooing these senators, and even considered naming two of them, Joe Manchin, of West Virginia, and Heidi Heitkamp, of North Dakota, to his Cabinet. Meanwhile, Democratic activists—generally in blue states—are calling for round-the-clock resistance. Protesters have gathered in front of Schumer's apartment, in Brooklyn's Park Slope, for rallies organized under the tagline "What the F*ck, Chuck?" (At least one demonstrator brought a model of a skeleton, to illustrate the importance of a spine.)

Can Schumer negotiate these currents? Can anyone? It seems no exaggeration to say that on these questions the future world depends. As Schumer

Seen as a pragmatist, Schumer hopes to reclaim populism for the Democrats.

himself put it the other morning, to the almost vacant Senate chamber, "This is not a drill."

SCHUMER, WHO'S SIXTY-SIX, is an optimist, a trait that he says he inherited from his father, Abe. Abe, for his part, inherited an exterminating business from his father, Jack, a Jewish immigrant from Ukraine. The family lived in Flatbush, Brooklyn, and Schumer, growing up, would sometimes lend a hand killing roaches.

One summer, instead of working for his dad, Schumer got a job with a neighbor, Stanley Kaplan, who, at that point, was still laying the foundations of his test-prep empire. Schumer mimeographed thousands of practice S.A.T.s, an experience he credits with boosting his own scores, which were just shy of sixteen hundred. He went off to Harvard. There he tried out for the basketball team, but was cut before he had a chance to touch the ball. This was in the fall of 1967, and a week or so later a fellow-student invited him to go to New Hampshire to campaign for Eugene McCarthy. Schumer had never heard of McCarthy, but he was lonely, so he went.

Almost immediately, in his words, he "caught the bug." He loved the excitement of politics, along with the camaraderie and the sense of being involved in great events. In 1974, the State Assembly seat for the district that included Flatbush came open. Fresh out of Harvard Law School, Schumer decided to run for it. His mother, Selma, urged her neighbors not to vote for him. Schumer had an offer from the prestigious law firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison; Selma didn't want him wasting his time when he could be making good money.

Schumer ended up spending six years in Albany. People who knew him in those days mostly remember his ambitiousness. In the New York State Capitol in the nineteen-seventies, county bosses called the shots, and initiative was not encouraged.

"There was an order," Mel Miller, who was elected to the Assembly a few years before Schumer and eventually became its speaker, told me. "You waited your turn. And Chuck was not going to wait his turn. I think that's the best

way to describe it. He was there to assert himself, and he was there to move on."

Schumer's reputation for aggressiveness followed him to Congress, where he arrived shortly after his thirtieth birthday. He won a seat on the House Banking Committee and began courting Wall Street; while still a freshman, he managed to amass the House's third-largest campaign account. (When, in 1982, Brooklyn lost a congressional seat to reapportionment, Schumer's enormous war chest insured that it was not his.) Even in the nation's fund-raising capital, the intensity of Schumer's efforts stood out. *The Hill* once reported that, having secured a contribution from a Republican lobbyist, Schumer insisted that the check be delivered by courier.

Just as assiduously as he pursued donors, Schumer wooed the press. Recognizing that it was hard to fill the Monday papers, he took to holding regular Sunday news conferences. He'd rail against college-tuition hikes or present a study documenting what he said were unfair disparities in health-

care costs. He was so skillful at generating coverage that his colleagues in the New York delegation invented a new term: to be upstaged on an issue was to be "Schumed."

In Washington, Schumer roomed with Leon Panetta, then a representative from California, and two other congressmen in a town house near Capitol Hill. To save money, Schumer slept in the living room, on a foldout couch. The place, which inspired a short-lived Amazon series called "Alpha House," was famously grungy, and Schumer was famously messy. He didn't worry about niceties like cleaning or even eating; often he dined on cold cereal. ("My favorite food," he told me.) Panetta, who went on to serve as the director of the C.I.A. and then as the Secretary of Defense, remembers him constantly rushing back to his district.

"He was one of the few people I knew who would go to grammar-school graduations, for God's sake," Panetta said.

"I don't think anyone can outwork

Chuck Schumer,” another “Alpha House” resident, Marty Russo, a former representative from Illinois, told me.

IF SCHUMER HAS a political philosophy, he owes it to a Long Island couple named Joe and Eileen Bailey. The Baileys live in Massepequa, a town on the South Shore, across the bay from Jones Beach. Joe works for an insurance company; Eileen is an administrative assistant in a physician’s office. The couple have three children, two of whom are grown. Economically, the Baileys are doing O.K., but they worry about rising property taxes and what the future holds for their kids. They’re not strong partisans. They feel that politicians of both parties sometimes condescend to them, something they hate. The Baileys voted for Bill Clinton twice, then, in 2000, after much agonizing, pulled the lever for George W. Bush.

This past November, the Baileys split their votes. Joe went with Trump, Eileen with Hillary. As for their kids, one was not yet eighteen, one voted for Clinton,

and the third sat out the election. A few weeks ago, Schumer informed me that Eileen was feeling more confident about her vote, “not that she ever liked Hillary that much.” Joe, meanwhile, was having second thoughts.

“He’s getting a little queasiness in his stomach,” Schumer said. “It just seems like amateur hour, and Joe’s not an amateur. He’s very good at what he does. He was angry at the liberal way, but he didn’t think Trump would be like this.”

To Schumer, the Baileys represent the sort of voters that the Democratic Party too often neglects, and that it needs to reach in order to survive. They are his reality check, which would be less noteworthy were they real.

Schumer dreamed up the Baileys during his first campaign for the Senate, in 1998. In the spring of that year, he was polling third in a three-way primary race, behind Geraldine Ferraro, the onetime Vice-Presidential nominee, and Mark Green, the former New York City public advocate. Things were looking so bad

that it was rumored Schumer was going to drop out. He called together his top aides to come up with a plan. There seemed little to be gained from criticizing his rivals’ views on issues like abortion and civil rights, since Schumer mostly shared their views. What he needed to do, he decided, was to reach those voters who cared more about unpaid bills and college tuition. These were the types of people he’d grown up with in Flatbush, and whose houses his father sprayed for pests. The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that the Baileys were the key to the race, and the more vivid the family became. They acquired parents—Eileen’s father had prostate cancer—and neighbors, some of whom had recently lost their jobs when the work was moved overseas.

Schumer spent the next few months hammering away at issues—big-impact or small-bore, depending on your perspective—like the high cost of flying out of the Albany and Rochester airports. With the Baileys by his proverbial side, he won

the primary and the chance to face the incumbent, a three-term senator, Alfonse D'Amato. The general-election campaign was the most expensive in the nation for that election cycle—Schumer spent something like three million dollars a month, D'Amato twice that amount—and, once again, Schumer's poll numbers were demoralizing. But a last-minute gaffe by D'Amato—in a private meeting he called Schumer a “putzhead,” then denied it, then said that he stood by the characterization “one hundred per cent”—helped Schumer win that race, too.

After Schumer was reelected in 2004, with more than seventy per cent of the vote—a record margin at the time—he wrote a book in which he tried to impart the lessons of his campaigns to Democrats nationwide. In “Positively American,” he offered policy proposals that included a tax deduction for college tuition, a crackdown on the use of questionable corporate tax shelters, and better enforcement of laws against hiring illegal immigrants. Schumer devoted a

lot of space to the Baileys, who, he wrote, felt that they were being ignored by a government too focussed on “the very poor or the very rich.” The Baileys, he maintained, could just as easily have been called the Ramirezes or the Kims or the Salims, but it was clear that the proposals in “Positively American” were aimed at middle-class white voters. These are the same voters, of course, who elected Trump, so even though Schumer was shocked by Clinton's defeat, in a certain sense he saw it coming.

“The good news is, when Newt Gingrich read my book, he said on TV, if Democrats followed Schumer's advice they'd be the dominant party for a generation,” Schumer told me. “The bad news is, no one did read it. I still have plenty of free copies, if you want one.”

MOST SENATORS HAVE offices a quarter of a mile or more from the Capitol and shuttle back and forth, using Congress's miniature subway system. Among the perks of being Minority

Leader is an office just steps away from the Senate chamber. It's a magnificent place, with eighteen-foot-high ceilings and a working fireplace. On a recent afternoon when I visited Schumer there, several logs were burning away merrily.

“I never had a fireplace before,” he said. “But they have these starter logs, so even I can do it.” He threw one on, to demonstrate.

Schumer began by asking me questions: Where did I grow up and what did my father do for a living? The conversation then turned to his father, who is ninety-three. Schumer had recently taken his parents—his mother is eighty-eight—to one of their favorite restaurants, Stella's, in the town of Floral Park, on Long Island.

“It's a nice restaurant,” he said. “And it's a good place to take the temperature.” The restaurant's patrons tend to be “very middle class, Irish Catholic, Italian Catholic. And they were very positive. They said, ‘Keep up the fight’—that sort of thing. I was pleased.” Schumer

told me that his wife, Iris Weinshall, who served as New York City's transportation commissioner under Mayors Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg, had packed the leftovers from the dinner in Tupperware, and he had brought them with him to Washington.

Schumer and Trump are frequently likened to each other, and for good reason. Both men spent their formative years in the outer boroughs (Trump in Jamaica Estates, Queens). Both crave attention. And both claim a native-New Yorker's nose for bullshit. But the differences are just as striking. There's no such thing as gold-plated Tupperware. When Schumer uses the word "fancy," it's spoken in a tone that implies "fancy-schmancy."

In the weeks following the election, Trump and Schumer engaged in a political dance that played out half in private, half in public. Comparing Schumer with his predecessor, Harry Reid, Trump tweeted, "I have always had a good relationship with Chuck Schumer. He is far smarter than Harry R and has the ability to get things done. Good news!" The President-elect phoned the Senator several times just, it seemed, to schmooze.

"Sometimes he'd call me—I wouldn't know why," Schumer told me. "He'd just chat." In one of these chats, the *New York Post* reported, Trump told Schumer that he had warmer feelings toward him than he had toward his fellow-Republicans Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan. As President, Trump opened his first official meeting with congressional leaders by reciting the names of friends he and Schumer had in common. Later, he reminisced about a fund-raiser he'd held at Schumer's request. Trump boasted that the gathering, at his Mar-a-Lago estate, in Palm Beach, had raised two million dollars for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Schumer corrected him: it was a little more than two hundred and sixty thousand. (Over the years, Trump and his family have donated roughly sixteen thousand dollars to Schumer's own Senate committee.)

"I enjoyed the President and Senator Schumer talking about all the people they

knew in New York," McConnell observed dryly when the meeting was over.

Schumer, for his part, indicated that he and Trump might find common ground. "Changing our trade laws dramatically, a large infrastructure bill, cleaning up the swamp in Washington—these are things that Democrats have always stood for and, frankly, Republicans have always been against," he said on "Meet the Press," in November. "So we're going to challenge President Trump to work with us on those issues."

For even entertaining the possibility of collaborating with Trump, he got a lot of grief. "Schumer has historically been really good at reaching out across the aisle,

which in let's call them 'normal times' is a great strategy to get things done," Elizabeth Zeldin, one of the organizers of the What the F*ck Chuck rallies, told me. "But I think everyone's feeling was, these are not normal times, this is not the time to make bipartisan motions."

In addition to the protesters who appeared in front of his apartment, chanting slogans like "You have a mission, lead the opposition," demonstrators in Washington heckled him on the steps of the Supreme Court. (Schumer and other prominent Democrats were also there to protest, against the President's travel ban.)

"Do your jobs!" the demonstrators yelled.

Since then, Schumer has taken an increasingly hard line. The day after the demonstration at the Supreme Court, he voted no on the nomination of Elaine Chao to be Secretary of Transportation. The vote was seen as particularly significant, because Chao is McConnell's wife. (In 1989, Elizabeth Dole, the wife of Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, was nominated to be Secretary of Labor. As the *Washington Post* noted, the idea of Minority Leader George Mitchell voting against her "would have been unimaginable. But the Senate, it is a changin'.") Schumer has voted no on all but two of the Cabinet nominees to come up for confirmation since Chao. These include Jeff Sessions, now the Attorney General; Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency; Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury Secretary;

Betsy DeVos, the Education Secretary; and Ben Carson, the Housing Secretary.

"This Cabinet is the most extreme, as well as the least vetted, as well as the most conflict-of-interest-laden Cabinet, I think, in the history of America," Schumer said to me the afternoon I visited him in his office. "It means there are almost no areas where we can compromise with Trump—or 'work together' is a better word. Don't use 'compromise.'"

Later, he told me he thought that people like Vice-President Mike Pence and the White House chief of staff, Reince Priebus, had directed the President's Cabinet picks, and that Trump might not even have been aware of his own nominees' views.

"On many of them, it was how they looked, how they felt, and he got captured by the hard right, but he goes along with it because that's not what he cares about," Schumer said. "And that's a really sad, to use his word, a very sad commentary on the President, to not care about the issues you're governing about."

UNTIL THE Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, in 1913, senators were chosen by state legislatures, or, in many cases, not chosen, since legislatures frequently deadlocked and left the seats vacant. The Senate is still guided today by rules that evoke another era, the most important of which is Rule 22, known as the cloture rule, which sets the conditions for ending debate. To invoke cloture, sixty votes are needed, although significant exceptions to this requirement have been carved out. In 2013, Harry Reid, then the Majority Leader, grew so frustrated by what he termed "unbelievable, unprecedented obstruction" by the Senate minority that he invoked the so-called "nuclear option." Using a set of arcane parliamentary maneuvers, he changed the interpretation, but not the actual text, of Rule 22, so that, in the case of Presidential nominations, cutting off debate would require only fifty-one votes. A further exemption to this exemption was made for nominations to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Schumer worked behind the scenes to forestall the nuclear option, then voted in favor of the maneuvers when Reid proposed them on the Senate floor. He now regards the whole episode as



regrettable. “I will say it was a mistake,” he told me.

The new arrangement left Senate Democrats no leverage over Trump’s Cabinet appointments. All they could do was drag out the proceedings. This they did, in part by staging all-night speaking marathons; then they watched as Republicans confirmed one “extreme” Cabinet member after another.

Many of the Trump Administration’s most consequential moves—including the original travel ban and its replacement—have been made via executive order. Others have been taken by federal agencies using their regulatory authority. The E.P.A. and the Transportation Department, for instance, have signalled their intention to roll back fuel-economy standards designed to reduce carbon emissions from cars and light trucks. (The rules are central to the U.S.’s commitments under the Paris climate accord.) Still others have involved the Congressional Review Act, a law that allows legislators to overturn recently finalized regulations with a simple majority vote in the Senate. One regulation reversed in this way was aimed at preventing mentally impaired people from buying guns.

“It’s not outrage of the day,” Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a Democrat from Rhode Island, told me. “It’s outrage of the hour.”

Ryan and McConnell are hoping to “repeal and replace” the Affordable Care Act using yet another vehicle for avoiding cloture—what’s known as a budget-reconciliation bill. The American Health Care Act, which was recently unveiled by House Republicans (and immediately dubbed “Trumpcare” by Democrats), could be approved in this way, though it’s not clear that it has enough G.O.P. backers. (Last week’s report from the Congressional Budget Office, which forecast that, in the course of the next decade, the measure would increase the number of uninsured Americans by twenty-four million, has further eroded Republican support.)

Eventually, the G.O.P. will run out of ways to bypass Senate Democrats and Rule 22. Later this spring, the federal government’s spending authority will run out, and, in the Senate, sixty votes will be needed to extend it. Schumer recently warned McConnell against trying

to include in the extension bill (or bills) any provisions that Democrats would find unacceptable, such as money to build a wall along the Mexican border. (The battle over the extension is distinct from the battle over the President’s proposed budget, which will play out this summer.) The extension must be approved by April 28th to avoid a government shutdown, and it could be the first real test of Schumer’s caucus. More likely, though, that test will come in the form of Neil Gorsuch.

Schumer has made his objections to Trump’s Supreme Court nominee clear. In an Op-Ed piece in the *Times* in February, he recounted that, in a “get-to-know-you” session, Gorsuch had refused to answer “even the most rudimentary questions.” At one point during the session, Gorsuch conceded that he was “disheartened” by the President’s attacks on various judges. When Schumer asked him whether he would be willing to state this publicly, he said no.

“The bar is always high to achieve a seat on the Supreme Court, but in these

unusual times—when there is unprecedented stress on our system of checks and balances—the bar is even higher,” Schumer wrote.

The debate over Gorsuch could play out in several ways. There are now forty-eight Democratic senators, counting Bernie Sanders, of Vermont, and Angus King, of Maine, who are technically independents. Five of these senators—Jon Tester, of Montana; Joe Donnelly, of Indiana; Claire McCaskill, of Missouri; and Manchin and Heitkamp—hail from solidly red states, and not infrequently vote with the Republicans. If they and four other Democrats back Gorsuch, he will be confirmed.

If forty Democrats decide to oppose Gorsuch—and many are still furious about McConnell’s refusal even to hold hearings on Merrick Garland, President Barack Obama’s nominee for the same seat—Republicans will be faced with a choice. They could let Gorsuch go down, or they could go nuclear and reinterpret Rule 22 to exclude Supreme Court nominees. Trump, not

surprisingly, has advocated the latter course. McConnell has, so far, been noncommittal.

"If I had to right now, I'd say he won't get sixty votes," Schumer told me when I asked about Gorsuch. Other Democratic senators I spoke with echoed this assessment, but just about everyone else I talked to in Washington predicted that Gorsuch would get the sixty votes.

ON A RECENT, unseasonably warm day in the town of Clay, near Syracuse, about twenty people gathered in front of a split-level house on Maryland Lane to wait for Schumer, who was going to hold a press conference in the driveway. One of the Senator's aides had set up a lectern on the blacktop, and a few reporters were stationed in front of it, but most of those assembled lived on the block, in similar-looking houses. When Schumer arrived, he glanced around and announced cheerfully, "This is like the neighborhood I grew up in—middle class, solid, hardworking people."

"We're not sure if we're middle class," an elderly woman called out.

"That's what a lot of people worry about," Schumer said, nodding. "It's harder to stay in the middle class than it ever was."

The subject of the press conference was taxes. As part of a broader federal-tax overhaul, various Republicans have proposed capping the deduction for mortgage-interest payments and eliminating state and local taxes. Schumer portrayed

the deductions as crucial to "middle-class homeowners." He promised to fight "tooth and nail" to keep them in place.

"In fact, we have a little battle cry: 'No reductions on your deductions,'" he said. "I didn't think that up. Good staff work." He asked for questions. A stout woman in a red jacket quickly changed the topic. She wanted to talk about the loss of manufacturing jobs in central New York. It was clear the question was a hostile one, but Schumer tried a conciliatory tone.

"That's a very excellent point, with which I agree," he said. "Jobs are key." He listed several manufacturing plants in the area he had worked to save and noted his opposition to free-trade deals. (As a congressman, Schumer voted against the North American Free Trade Agreement, in 1993.)

"One of the reasons all these jobs left is trade treats us unfairly," he said. "We have to change our trade laws." The woman wasn't satisfied. She thought the problem was New York's minimum wage, which, under a new state law, will climb to fifteen dollars an hour. Schumer supported the increase. They went back and forth for a while.

"Thank you for coming," Schumer finally said. "I know you probably don't agree with me."

"I don't agree with you," the woman said. "Absolutely not."

Schumer is a big believer in the power of showing up. Since he was elected to the Senate, he has visited each of New

York's sixty-two counties at least once a year.

"People said, 'With your new position, will you tour the sixty-two counties again?'" he told the group on the driveway. "Absolutely."

"Even now, people say, 'Chuck is around; Kirsten is not,'" one prominent New York Democrat told me. (Kirsten Gillibrand, New York's junior senator, occupies the seat formerly held by Hillary Clinton.)

"People want to be talked to," Schumer told me a few hours after the stop in Clay. "These days more than ever." He had just finished another press conference, at the police station in Utica, and was eating lunch at an Italian restaurant in the town of New Hartford. He brought up the woman in the red jacket: "Like that lady today—she wanted to express her opinion, God bless her."

Schumer is often described as a "pragmatist." Sometimes this is meant as a tribute, sometimes not. Even as he travels around the state, championing the middle class, in Washington Schumer devotes much of his time to the concerns of the super-wealthy. New York's economy is heavily dependent on finance, so its representatives tend to be banker-friendly; Schumer has been called "the senator from Wall Street." In the years leading up to the financial crisis, he worked to limit oversight of credit-rating agencies and sponsored legislation to cut fees on financial transactions. In a letter to the *Wall Street Journal*, written with Mayor Bloomberg in late 2006, he complained that too many regulatory agencies were overseeing the financial industry, and were competing "to be the toughest cop on the street." Following the crisis, Schumer changed his tune and supported greater oversight and tougher regulation. Still, he remains a top recipient of Wall Street contributions. During the last election cycle, he raised more than five million dollars from the financial sector, according to a report by Americans for Financial Reform, a liberal nonprofit. That figure put him behind just two other senators, Marco Rubio, of Florida, and Ted Cruz, of Texas, both of whom were running for the Republican Presidential nomination.

"He isn't just one thing," Barbara Roper, the director of investor protection at the Consumer Federation of



"All right, but just one more episode."

America, said. "In between crises, he may be a friend to Wall Street and advance an agenda that we, frankly, think of as harmful. But, if you're talking about what he did during the financial crisis, he was an advocate for strong reform. And then there are a whole host of issues that have to do with more bread-and-butter consumer issues where he's been a strong and reliable supporter."

Barney Frank, the former Massachusetts congressman and one of the chief authors of the financial-reform bill that became known as Dodd-Frank, sat next to Schumer in House committees for eighteen years.

Politicians "are often either good inside players or good outside players," Frank told me. "Chuck is unusually good at both. He understands that in a legislative body, sharing power with so many people, you need to compromise. Another thing that you need to do, which he does, but which other people do not do, is eschew an attitude of moral superiority." Through a spokesman, Hillary Clinton called Schumer "a strong progressive and great legislative strategist," who "knows how and when to give 'em hell."

Over the years, Schumer's talents as a "legislative strategist" have put him at the center of some of Congress's most contentious negotiations. He was a primary author of the Brady Bill, which required federal background checks for gun buyers, and one of the key authors of the 1994 crime bill, which put close to a hundred thousand police on the streets, offered incentives to states to lengthen prison sentences, and banned the manufacture of assault weapons for civilian use. (This last provision has since lapsed.) More recently, in 2013, Schumer was part of the so-called Gang of Eight, a group of four Democratic and four Republican senators who crafted a sweeping package of immigration reforms. The reforms would have created a path to citizenship for millions of people now living in the U.S. illegally and, at the same time, would have made it more difficult for employers to hire undocumented workers. The bill passed the Senate but died in the House.

"On any issue involving New York, I have always felt, if I can get it through the House, Chuck will definitely get it through the Senate," Representative

Peter King, a Republican from Long Island, told me. "You just know that whether he's in the majority or in the minority he's going to get it through." Schumer was instrumental in securing twenty billion dollars for New York after the September 11th attacks, and fifty-one billion dollars for the region after Hurricane Sandy.

At the Italian restaurant, I asked Schumer about his approach to negotiations. He had polished off a plate of gluten-free pasta and was working his way through the cream filling from a cannoli. There was still a lot of food on the table, because the restaurant, where he's a regular, had sent out heaping platters. Schumer asked the waitress to box up the leftovers and urged me to take them home.

"Here's the formula I've used," he said. "Walk in the other guy's shoes. Try to figure out not what you think he should want but what he really wants. Don't look down, and you can get things done."

IN DECEMBER, 2014, shortly after the midterm election, Schumer gave a speech at the National Press Club, in Washington. Democrats had just lost control of the Senate, which they'd held for the previous eight years. In the speech, Schumer described American politics as a long-running battle "between pro-government and anti-government forces."

From the nineteen-thirties through the nineteen-seventies, according to Schumer, pro-government forces, which is to say Democrats, were victorious. This was largely due to F.D.R. and the New Deal, which "demonstrated that government could indeed improve the standard of living for average Americans." With the election of Ronald Reagan, in 1980, anti-government forces, which is to say Republicans, gained ascendance. By Schumer's account, G.O.P. dominance lasted until around the year 2000, at which point stagnating middle-class incomes prompted many Americans, once again, to switch sides. In 2008, Obama was elected President, and Democrats won majorities in both houses of Congress.

"Unfortunately, Democrats blew the opportunity," Schumer told the press club. "We put all our focus on the wrong problem—health-care reform." Health

care was a huge problem for the millions of Americans who lacked insurance, but this was a minority compared with the hundreds of millions of people insured either by the government, through Medicaid and Medicare, or by their employers. Among that minority, only a fraction would turn out to vote. Democrats would have been much better off, Schumer argued, had they focussed first on issues affecting a broader swath of the American electorate—the swath that includes families like the Baileys.

“Had we started more broadly, the middle class would have been more receptive to the idea that President Obama wanted to help them,” Schumer said. “They would have held a more pro-government view. Then Democrats would have been in a better position to tackle our nation’s health-care crisis.” What the Democrats needed to do, heading into a Presidential race, was come up with an agenda to “win back those core white working-class voters who turn out most.” The speech prompted outrage from the Obama Administration; one former speechwriter for the President said that it represented “the worst instincts of the Democratic Party in action.” Others observed that Schumer, at that time the chairman of the Democratic Policy and Communications Committee, had helped put together the Party’s message for 2014 and was in no position to point a finger.

Schumer’s assessment of 2016 is similar to his analysis of 2014, but with an added dollop of self-criticism. “When you lose an election like this, you don’t blink,” he told me when the conversation turned to November. “You look it in the eye and say, ‘What did we do wrong?’ And I include myself in this; I don’t just point at Hillary or anybody else.

“When you lose to a candidate who is so unpopular—yes, you could say if Comey wasn’t there we would have won,” he went on, referring to James Comey, the F.B.I. director. “But we should have won anyway, with Comey and with the hacking. And we did not have a sharp, strong, populist enough economic message. If you ask average voters, ‘What did we stand for?’ they say we weren’t Trump. It wasn’t good enough.”

Schumer told me that he and his staff were working to craft such an economic

message in preparation for 2018. “It’s going to be based on two things—putting more money in the average person’s pocket and reducing the expenses they pay out of their pocket,” he said. “I was going to call it the paycheck agenda, but my staff reminded me that people under forty-five don’t know what a paycheck is.”

He assured me that the agenda was “going to be really good.” In a challenge to Trump, Senate Democrats have proposed their own infrastructure plan, totalling a trillion dollars. But when I asked Schumer if he could share any other parts of the agenda with me, he said no.

SCHUMER IS ONE of the only members of the U.S. Senate to still use a flip phone, which sometimes seems attached to his ear. He calls the other forty-seven members of his caucus so frequently that he has memorized all their numbers.

“He reaches out constantly,” Senator Al Franken, a Democrat from Minnesota, told me.

“He knows what everyone’s working on,” Senator Elizabeth Warren, of Massachusetts, said. “He knows what people are interested in and what they are worried about.”

“Chuck is like a giant shop vac with nine nozzles to suck up information,” Senator Whitehouse said.

Schumer has enlarged the Senate’s Democratic leadership team, so that now more than a fifth of his caucus members have some kind of title. Among those elevated were Sanders, one of the caucus’s most liberal members, and Manchin, easily its most conservative.

“Chuck expanded his leadership team and I’m part of it, and I’m thankful for that, because on a lot of things I don’t agree with the national Democratic Party,” Manchin told me. He said he was particularly pleased that Schumer had decided to hold a recent caucus retreat in his home state of West Virginia.

“We brought in a panel of six or seven lifelong Democrats that had all voted Republican,” Manchin related. “What they said is, ‘We grew up with the Democrats always being for the working people, and now we believe’—this is what they said—‘that the Democratic Party is the party that’s preventing men and women from working.’”

In a local sense, all the tumult of the past two months has made Schu-

mer’s life easier. The divisions in his caucus—between blue-state and red-state Democrats, between the “progressive” and the “pragmatic” wings of the Party, between everyone and Joe Manchin—look a lot less stark when viewed against the backdrop of the Trump White House.

“If Trump had come out with a significant infrastructure investment right off the bat, it would probably have splintered the Democrats,” Brian Fallon, who served as Schumer’s spokesman and then as Hillary Clinton’s, observed. “They would have been hard-pressed, especially those from red states, to be on the opposing side of a jobs bill. Instead, he’s largely united them.”

But, in a bigger-picture sense, it’s tough to overstate the obstacles that Democrats in the Senate—and just about everywhere else—are facing. Next year, elections will be held for thirty-four Senate seats. Democrats currently hold twenty-five of these, and the Party will have to hold on to all twenty-five just to stay even. Were Democrats to pick up two seats—a feat most analysts regard as nearly impossible, no matter how much havoc Trump wreaks—they would still, for all practical purposes, be in the minority, as the Senate would be split fifty-fifty, and a Republican, Vice-President Pence, would cast the tie-breaking vote. Meanwhile, Republicans now control thirty-three state legislatures, just one shy of the number needed to circumvent Congress and call a constitutional convention.

Despite all this—and despite the revelations about Russia, and the hastily written executive orders, and the unvetted Cabinet secretaries, and the regulatory reversals, and the leaks and the tweets and the counter-tweets—Schumer, ever the optimist, told me he was upbeat.

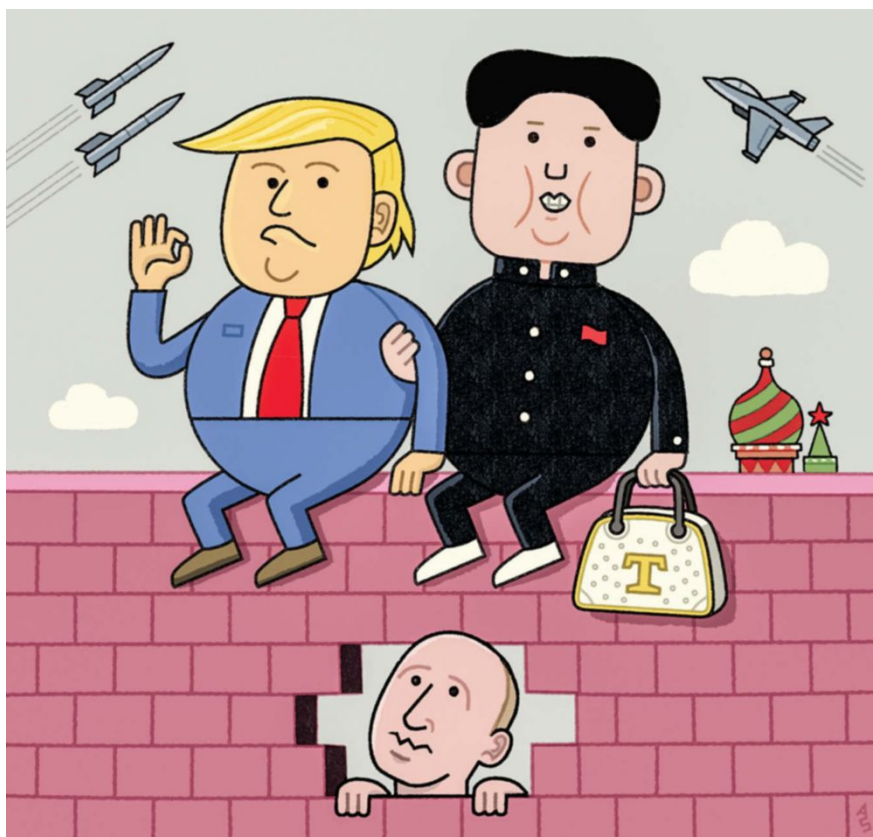
“I have surprised myself,” he said at one point. “Even though this is a total change for me in so many ways, I enjoy waking up in the morning and being ready for the fight.”

At another point, he said, “Deep, deep down, I believe in the American people—their solidness, their decency, even at times when they’re angry and frustrated, their pulling back and trying to do the right thing. And I’ve believed in it my whole life and this is the most challenging time for it, but I still believe in it. And, if I’m wrong, God help America.” ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

KIM JONG-UN NO PATSY

BY BRUCE MCCALL



ENEMY OF NICENESS V. Putin per-severes in his campaign to shamelessly gush over naïve rookie U.S. President D. Trump. Dear Leader Kim Jong-un knows this to be a Russo-American conspiracy to ridicule the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Kim Jong-un's haircut, and his honored sibling. Kim Jong-un, contemptuous of the International Jealous Front's quibbles about his nuclear-weapons program and his success in having his fat-boy half brother Kim Jong-nam massaged with a poison face rub in a busy air terminal, defiantly issues Aphorism No. 63539-J: *Hooligan traitor saboteurs are more easily squashed by organophosphate than by vinegar or honey.*

V. Putin, meanwhile, hoists papier-mâché “barbells” while ruthlessly pressing his campaign of praising the vain rookie U.S. President D. Trump at every turn—a transparent Kremlin attempt

to shut out life-of-the-party Kim Jong-un by making him seem, by contrast, like an unfunny midget warlord who feeds uncles to dogs. This cynical trick will not succeed. Therefore, here it comes, Kim Jong-un's Aphorism No. 63548-J: *To the winner go the spoils, while the loser is bound to a kitchen chair in a bean field and atomized by cannon fire.*

The warning is clear: to vanquish V. Putin's impudent show of ersatz enthusiasm for D. Trump, and to smash this unholy alliance and thereby restore the D.P.R.K.'s first-placeness, Dearer by the Minute Leader Kim Jong-un has issued to the forty-first plenary session of the one-thousand-two-hundred-and-fifty-sixth Juche Talkathon the following order: “Mobilize a heroic patriotic smiling-charm offensive.”

What exactly is a smiling-charm offensive? Shut up and read on: The smiling-charm offensive is a self-protective defense measure designed to

counter V. Putin's cynical and highly naughty charm offensive on D. Trump, so that Dear Leader and Loyal Pal Kim Jong-un will no longer be excluded from fun U.S. bridge parties, barbecues, buffet suppers, etc.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

It is my Party and I will rule as I want to, Rule as I want to, rule as I want to.

You would rule, too, if Dear Leader were you!

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Q: How can Dear Leader Kim maneuver D. Trump into, say, pushing V. Putin off the roof of Trump Tower and then telling Fox News that “Kim is a beautiful, wonderful guy—believe me, I know”?

A: Kim Jong-un counters this impudent challenge by the turd-tossing camp with Aphorism No. 63541-J: *The enemy of my friend is exposed as the friend of my enemy, has already been fed into a cement mixer, and is now a speed bump in the pavement of the parking lot behind the Kim Jong-un Academy of Hairdressing, in Pyongyang.*

STATE SECRET, DO NOT READ

Instructions for smiling-charm offensive: E-mail to supreme hair fan D. Trump JPEGs of enlarged black-and-white photos of the head of V. Putin, revealing advanced male-pattern baldness, and color glossies of Kim's luxuriant pompadour. Follow this by delivering to the main White House gate, under cover of night, a live baby seal, club included, in a basket. Immediately commence five-for-the-price-of-one blowout sale of Ivanka Trump handbags, shoes, and fashion jewelry at every D.P.R.K. government outlet mart.

Note: Further smiling-charm-offensive suggestions welcome. Hurry!

Dear Leader Kim Jong-un, already running late for the Dennis Rodman roast, must bolt, but leaves us to ponder his Aphorism No. 63542-J: *Sticks and stones will break your bones, but refusing to name names only ends with discovery of one can of Kim's Powdered Chowder in Grandma's mailbox.* ♦

THE LISTENER

Lynn Nottage's plays give voice to the disenfranchised.

BY MICHAEL SCHULMAN



THE PLAYWRIGHT Lynn Nottage sometimes doesn't know what her plays are about until well after she's finished them. At the Yale School of Drama, in the late nineteen-eighties, she based a play on a news item about a Brazilian town where locals had found a glowing capsule thought to have supernatural powers; it turned out to contain radioactive waste, and more than a hundred thousand people were contaminated. Sometime later, Nottage realized that she had been writing about AIDS, which had claimed the lives of a number of her classmates and teachers. After her mother died, of Lou Gehrig's disease, in 1997, she wrote a play called "The Emperor and the Scribe," about a dying African ruler and his amanuensis. "It wasn't until

a year later I was, like, 'Oh, that's about me and my mother,'" Nottage told me.

With her latest work, "Sweat," Nottage's accidental insight was not into herself but into the American electorate. The play is set in Reading, Pennsylvania, where she spent two and a half years interviewing residents. Much of the action takes place at a bar where the steelworkers hang out; among them are Cynthia, who is black, and Tracey, who is white. Both apply for a job in management; Cynthia gets it. Soon, the company issues layoffs—it's shipping jobs to Mexico—and the workers strike, pitting Cynthia against her old friends. The bar's tenuous ecosystem unravels: economic anxiety begets racial resentment (Tracey thinks that Cynthia got the promotion because she's black),

To write "Sweat," Nottage spent years interviewing residents of Reading, Pennsylvania.

xenophobia (a Colombian busboy who works as a scab is targeted), and violence.

The play opened at the Public Theatre last November, five days before the Presidential election, which gave the country a new fixation: the Rust Belt working class. Who were these people who had cast their lot with Donald Trump? Why had the media—and the Democrats—largely ignored their troubles? Nottage was an unlikely teller of the story: an Ivy League-educated black woman from Brooklyn. "One of the mantras I heard the steelworkers repeat over and over again was 'We invested so many years in this factory, and they don't see us. We're invisible,'" Nottage said. "I think it profoundly hurt their feelings."

Nottage, who has thick dreads and a warm, warbling voice, has built a career on making invisible people visible. Her plays, including "Ruined," for which she won the Pulitzer Prize, are vigorously researched and unapologetic about their social concerns, at a time when critics tend to dismiss "issue plays." At fifty-two, she is sprightlier than her more serious work suggests, a quality that helps earn the trust of her subjects, whether in Africa or in coal country. "Lynn carries something with her," Kate Whoriskey, the director of "Ruined" and "Sweat," said. "People immediately recognize that she has integrity."

"Sweat"'s transfer to Studio 54—it is Nottage's Broadway debut—may make it the first theatrical landmark of the Trump era: a tough yet empathetic portrait of the America that came undone. "Most folks think it's the guilt or rage that destroys us," one character says. "But I know from experience that it's shame that eats us away until we disappear." Nottage wasn't prescient—she was as shocked as anyone by the election result. But what wasn't shocking "was the extent of the pain," she told me. "These were people who felt helpless, who felt like the American dream that they had so deeply invested in had been suddenly ripped away. I was sitting with these white men, and I thought, You sound like people of color in America."

"SWEAT" HAD ITS origin in 2011, with an e-mail from one of Nottage's neighbors in Brooklyn, a single mother, who confessed that she was broke. "She has this bubbly, outgoing personality, and it was really kind of devastating to realize that she was in such dire straits,"

Nottage recalled. "It made me think a lot about how close we live to poverty." The next morning, Nottage brought the friend to Zuccotti Park to see the Occupy Wall Street protest. The friend cheered up, she said, because "she wasn't alone."

But Nottage was perturbed: "How did we arrive at this point?" She decided to investigate a struggling city. She read in the *Times* that the Census Bureau had found Reading to be the poorest American city of its size, with a poverty rate of more than forty per cent. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival had commissioned her to write a play about an American revolution; she chose the de-industrial revolution, which she called "the biggest shift in American sensibilities since the nineteen-sixties." On her first trip to Reading, she and her assistant pulled into a gas station, and a guy told them, "Can I give you a piece of advice? Get out before sundown."

Nottage wasn't fazed. In 2005, she had travelled to Uganda, to research the play that would become "Ruined." The idea was to re-set Bertolt Brecht's "Mother Courage and Her Children" in the Congo, which was reeling from civil war. During three trips, she interviewed women in refugee camps and demobilized soldiers from the Lord's Resistance Army. At one point, she and her husband, Tony Gerber, a documentary filmmaker, were trying to cross the border on foot, after a banana truck blocked their car. A crowd surrounded them and began shouting at Gerber, who is white. "They're saying they're going to stone him to death," their translator told them brightly. "But I don't think it's going to happen, so don't worry!"

"Ruined," which is set in a Congolese brothel, opened at Manhattan Theatre Club in 2009. Ben Brantley, in the *Times*, noted its "raw and genuine agony." There was talk of moving it to Broadway, but, Nottage said, "repeatedly I heard, 'There are no black actresses who can open a Broadway play.' It was frustrating—the unwillingness to gamble on this play that had proven to be very successful, because it was written by a woman of color and starred women of color."

Some playwrights work within a consistent aesthetic world—Arthur Miller's mid-century morality plays, Annie Baker's chatty hipster miniatures—but Nottage shifts wildly from play to play,

calling her oeuvre "schizophrenic." After "Ruined," she wrote "By the Way, Meet Vera Stark," a postmodern screwball comedy about a nineteen-thirties Hollywood star resembling Hattie McDaniel. Her most popular work is "Intimate Apparel," about a black seamstress in early-twentieth-century New York. "What drew me to it was that it was a full story of a woman," Viola Davis, who starred in it Off Broadway, in 2004, said. "Lynn's characters go on a full journey. In the end, you fully understand their pathology."

Nottage feels that what unifies her plays is their "morally ambiguous heroes or heroines, people who are fractured within their own bodies, who have to make very difficult choices in order to survive." Each character in "Sweat" commits a reprehensible act, whether it's Cynthia's failing to stand with her friends on the picket line or Tracey's exhibiting a newfound racism. The plays also give voice to marginalized lives. "Her main characters happen to be African-American women who are dark-skinned and who probably otherwise wouldn't be considered beautiful," Davis said. "She gives you the beauty, because she gives their lives a lyricism. She pays attention, in the same way Arthur Miller pays attention to Willy Loman."

Though "Sweat" harks back to the working-class naturalism of Clifford Odets, Nottage is eager to push beyond the proscenium. She teaches a graduate course at Columbia, called "American Spectacle," and takes her students on field trips: a Coney Island sideshow, a murder trial, a Times Square mega church. "I had this feeling that arts institutions were closing in and demanding that playwrights shape their visions to the space," she said one night last month. "So the goal is to create a whole generation of resistance." I had met her and six students at the Slipper Room, a burlesque club. She was interested in "the gaze," she said, and in "the way people slowly remove layers. It's an exercise in subtext."

A rowdy crowd formed as the show began. Like a hip Mary Poppins, Nottage sipped a bourbon as her charges watched a woman in a flapper dress strip to her panties while hula-hooping. After the show, Nottage gave the students an assignment. "Think about what dialogue you want to have with the audience," she told them. "This

burlesque show is less about stripping all the layers than about audience engagement and spectacle."

NOTTAGE LIVES in the house where she grew up, a century-old brownstone on Dean Street, in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, filled with modern art and African masks collected by her parents, Ruby and Wally Nottage. One recent night, the house was buzzing with people, including Nottage's brother Aaron and Gerber, her husband, who observed that the ages of the house's population ranged "from eight to eighty-eight." The eight-year-old was their son, Mel, whom they adopted from Ethiopia. The eighty-eight-year-old was Wally, who was downstairs, in hospice care.

Nottage's parents bought the house in 1966. Wally was a social worker focusing on juvenile delinquency, and Ruby taught at a public school in Bed-Stuy. They were a social, sophisticated couple, and their friends included artists, politicians, and feminist leaders, like Bella Abzug. Ruby gave her children an Afrocentric education, and filled in their picture books with a brown marker—the Little Prince became black. Along with Betty Shabazz and Eugenia Clarke (the wives of Malcolm X and John Henrik Clarke), Ruby formed a program called the Black School, which Nottage attended on weekends. "We learned to tie-dye, because tie-dyeing was traditionally a black art," she recalled.

The surrounding neighborhoods were self-segregated—a few blocks away was all Italian—but Boerum Hill in the seventies was a bastion of multiculturalism. The writer Jonathan Lethem grew up down the block, and later fictionalized the area in his novel "The Fortress of Solitude"; Nottage's brother (now a Brooklyn district attorney) was the model for a character named Henry, and the stoop where the kids play games was the Nottages', where Wally would keep watch. "Their house was a haven and a beacon," Lethem told me. "They would open their back yard to kids in the neighborhood. The snacks were laid out: bug juice and paper cups for every kid."

Wally and Ruby were hands-off parents. The kids played in the street, "like free-range chickens," Lynn Nottage said. One summer, she and Aaron were at a sleepaway camp in Pennsylvania (where

Nottage beat her fellow-camper Laura Linney for an acting prize), and their parents were a week late picking them up. “When we got older, they started talking about places they had been, like Guadeloupe,” Aaron said. “That’s when I realized: they’d send us away, and they would travel.”

As a child, Lethem recalled, “Lynn was a watchful, wise-beyond-her-years presence on the block. I felt the power of her awareness and her watching and, sometimes, her intervening kindness.” When Nottage was twelve, her father slipped while carrying a piece of slate in the back yard. Not realizing that he had broken his back, he took the kids to Prospect Park to play Frisbee. “He came home and didn’t move for two years,” Nottage recalled. She switched from private to public school, while Ruby supported the family on her teacher’s salary.

In ninth grade, Nottage and Lethem started at the High School of Music & Art, where he studied painting and she played the flute. Every day, they shared an hour-long ride on the A train, which Lethem recalled as “a mind-blowing exodus from the local scene through the entire length of Manhattan up to a Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street.” Together, they honed their powers of observation. The conductor would sit with his wife until she kissed him and got off in lower Manhattan. Then, a few stops later, his mistress would get on. “We’re these two bug-eyed kids who’ve been told to stick to the conductor like glue,” Lethem said, “and he spotted us, day after day, watching this little playlet go on.”

At school, a racial double standard as-

serted itself. An English teacher who was inspirational to Lethem bedevilled Nottage. When she signed her name to papers, she got B’s or C’s, but on anonymous exercises she got A’s. Nottage wrote the teacher a letter saying, “I deserve a 96 in this class, and here’s the reason why.” Years later, Lethem asked Nottage for her memories of Boerum Hill. “She said, ‘Every kid we grew up with either went to jail or into law enforcement.’ I replied, looking at her and myself, ‘There was a third way—you could become a writer.’”

Nottage had grown up seeing plays by the Negro Ensemble Company, most memorably Charles Fuller’s “Zooman and the Sign.” But when she enrolled at Brown University, in 1982, she was pre-med. Organic chemistry put an end to that, and she gravitated toward her playwriting professor, George Bass, the executor of Langston Hughes’s estate. “He was into ritual, and theatre as a sacred space,” Nottage said. Once, he told the students to close their eyes and hold out their hands, and gave each a chunk of Hughes’s ashes. (Nottage still has hers, in a silver case.)

Another teacher was Paula Vogel, who “introduced me to the notion that you can make a career as a playwright,” Nottage said. In 1986, she started at the Yale School of Drama, but the AIDS and crack epidemics overshadowed her time there. She didn’t think the school was invested in her as a playwright, and in turn she felt less invested in playwriting. “I thought, I need to do something that feels like it will have impact,” she said. After graduation, she sold her computer and began working as the national press officer for Amnesty International. The

job had international scope—she toured with the Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchú—but she was frustrated that the group neglected women’s issues like genital mutilation. She would draft press releases about human-rights abuses, hoping for a blurb in the *Times*. “I thought, There must be a better way of communicating stories,” she said. One day, after seeing a portfolio of domestic-abuse victims by the photographer Donna Ferrato, she closed her office door and wrote her first play in years: a one-act called “Poof!,” about a battered wife who tells her husband to go to hell, after which he spontaneously combusts.

Nottage sent the play to the Actors Theatre of Louisville, where it won a prize in a festival. She quit her job and started temping and writing. At Playwrights Horizons, she joined a workshop for black playwrights, which turned into “a therapeutic bitch session”: she and the others felt that nonprofit theatres were using them to fill a diversity quota but not producing their work. Eventually, in 1997, Playwrights Horizons did stage Nottage’s “Mud, River, Stone,” about a well-off New York couple who go to Africa to “find their roots.” As the play was going up, Nottage’s life was undergoing huge changes. Her daughter, Ruby, was born three weeks before rehearsals. During previews, her mother died.

At the same time, her grandmother Waple Newton was succumbing to alcoholism. In her day, Newton had been a splendid raconteur, with friends like Shirley Chisholm. As Newton lost her lucidity, Nottage cleaned out her house, in Crown Heights. Wedged between the pages of an issue of *Family Circle*, Nottage found a passport photo of her great-grandmother Ethel Armstrong. With her mother gone and her grandmother incapacitated, she had no one to ask about Ethel’s life, so she decided to invent a life for her. The play that resulted, “Intimate Apparel,” won a New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award and became the most produced play in the country in the 2005-06 season.

THE DAY AFTER “Sweat” had its first preview on Broadway, Nottage, Gerber, and a film crew drove to Reading. Nottage didn’t want to feel like “a carpetbagger,” so she and Gerber had devised an installation piece that will open



“The kids have been out there awhile.”

in Reading in May, a Joseph Beuys-like “social sculpture” combining performance, visual projections, and interviews documenting the city’s decline and attempts at rebirth. The work, called “This Is Reading,” will occupy the long-vacant Franklin Street Railroad Station.

The demise of the Reading Railroad, which remains a two-hundred-dollar property on the Monopoly board, is intertwined with the city’s slump. As chronicled by its native son John Updike, Reading once thrived on its steel mills and coal mines and became “the outlet capital of the world.” The train to Philadelphia shut down in 1981, along with foundries and textile factories. Manufacturing jobs have dropped thirty per cent since 1995, and only eight per cent of residents have a bachelor’s degree. A majority of the city’s population is now Hispanic, further alienating the white working class.

The group parked at the Reading Railroad Heritage Museum, which opened in 2008, in a defunct steel foundry. A guide showed them the collection: model trains, old maps. Nottage said that she was looking for artifacts for the installation, part of a “visual tapestry” to trigger memories of the way Reading used to be.

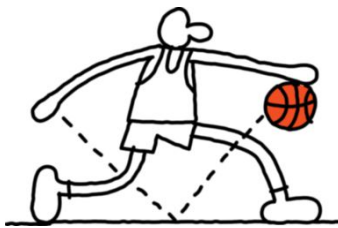
Afterward, Nottage and I drove through town, passing a bar called Mike’s Tavern, which had inspired the central location of “Sweat.” “You don’t see the poverty, but it’s there,” Nottage said. She approached her research with the motto “Replace judgment with curiosity,” but her empathy was tested at times—for instance, when she noticed that an ex-con whom she’d been interviewing had white-supremacist tattoos.

In a restaurant at the new Double-Tree Hotel, we met a sixty-five-year-old native named Doug Graybill. After serving in Vietnam, Graybill had problems readjusting and was repeatedly arrested. (“I would actually beg the cops to shoot me,” he said.) Despite stints as an ironworker, he struggled to make ends meet and was periodically homeless. Eight years ago, he and his wife, Liz, started a nonprofit group called Veterans Making a Difference. Graybill would bring food and supplies to shantytowns that had sprung up in the woods; during Nottage’s research for “Sweat,” he guided her there to interview the residents.

“So, how is Reading doing?” Nottage asked Graybill, who sipped soup.

“It’s not getting any better,” he said. He told her that he had burned out and had had to cut down on his services. With his bad back, he could no longer haul heavy bags of food into the woods. “It was just getting to be more and more. I can’t keep everyone out of jail and I can’t pay everyone’s rent. I can’t buy formula for every baby.”

“What about your boy in charge—Trump?” Nottage asked. Though Reading had leaned toward Clinton, Berks



County had gone for Trump by a ten-point margin; Obama had won by nine points in 2008. Graybill voted for Trump, because “I didn’t want to give up my guns,” he said. But he wasn’t optimistic. “Nobody’s going to make it any better,” he told Nottage. “Obama didn’t make it any better in eight years. Trump’s not going to do it in eight years. Nobody’s going to, unless there’s the same number of jobs there were forty years ago.”

“A lot of those jobs aren’t coming back,” Nottage said gently.

Graybill said that he’d been seeing “the Wizard” (his shrink) once a week, but he was haunted by the desperation around him. “I can’t hear another sad story. I can’t hear about another person going to jail. I don’t want to hear about three sick kids and no food.”

Nottage nodded: “When I was at Amnesty International, I was seeing a chiropractor three times a week.”

“I feel guilty,” Graybill went on. “Because I got a chance to shower and shave this morning, and put on deodorant and clean clothes.”

“When you come and you hear these stories, you feel incredibly guilty,” Nottage agreed. “That’s the reason I wanted to come back. You can’t just run away.”

BEFORE NOTTAGE STARTS a new play, she makes herself a soundtrack. For “Intimate Apparel” (which she and the composer Ricky Ian Gordon are turning into an opera), the playlist included ragtime artists like Scott Joplin. For “By the

Way, Meet Vera Stark,” she listened to Ethel Waters and Bessie Smith. The “Sweat” soundtrack began with “Smooth,” by Santana. “From the moment I conceived the play, that’s how I heard it starting,” she told me.

She was in a rehearsal room, where the cast was about to run Act I, Scene 2. It’s the first scene at the bar, when the subject of the open supervisor position comes up. “The real darkness is there and looming in the distance, but hasn’t yet touched them,” Nottage explained.

At the Public, the scene opened with everyone dancing to “Smooth,” which Nottage liked because it represented all the characters: “You have a little R. & B., a little rock and roll, a little pop, a little Latino flavor.” But the production hadn’t cleared the rights for Broadway, so Whoriskey, the director, had lined up alternatives. The stage manager played Ricky Martin’s “Livin’ la Vida Loca,” while the actors danced.

Nottage frowned. “It’s fun, but it’s too fast,” she whispered to Whoriskey. “They’re going to have heart attacks.”

They tried Marc Anthony’s “I Need to Know.” “Much better,” Nottage said. (Later, she lamented, “There’s no song that’s as perfect as ‘Smooth.’”) The actors ran the scene, in which the characters discuss the possible layoffs:

CYNTHIA: That rumor’s been flying around for months. Nobody’s going anywhere.

STAN: Okay, you keep telling yourself that, but you saw what happened over at Clemmon’s Technologies. No one saw that coming. Right? You could wake up tomorrow and all your jobs are in Mexico, whatever, it’s this NAFTA bullshit—

TRACEY: What the fuck is NAFTA? Sounds like a laxative.

Nottage laughed. The scene is set in 2000, but the workers she met in Reading were well aware of NAFTA, which resulted in jobs moving overseas. In the campaign, Trump used the fact that Bill Clinton had signed NAFTA as a cudgel against Hillary. (“Worst trade deal ever.”)

If “Sweat” shows the fissures that were forming in Reading, the election cracked them wide open. “Now it’s like the San Andreas Fault,” Nottage said. Her characters, who already face long odds, would be even more divided in Trump’s America, and just as invisible. “I worry about Reading, which needs good governance in order to resurrect itself,” she said. “I fear that it’s going to be overlooked.” ♦

TRUMP'S MONEY MAN

How Robert Mercer, a reclusive hedge-fund tycoon, exploited America's populist insurgency.

BY JANE MAYER

LAST MONTH, WHEN President Donald Trump toured a Boeing aircraft plant in North Charleston, South Carolina, he saw a familiar face in the crowd that greeted him: Patrick Caddell, a former Democratic political operative and pollster who, for forty-five years, has been prodding insurgent Presidential candidates to attack the Washington establishment. Caddell, who lives in Charleston, is perhaps best known for helping Jimmy Carter win the 1976 Presidential race. He is also remembered for having collaborated with his friend Warren Beatty on the 1998 satire “Bulworth.” In that film, a kamikaze candidate abandons the usual talking points and excoriates both the major political parties and the media; voters love his unconventionality, and he becomes improbably popular. If the plot sounds familiar, there’s a reason: in recent years, Caddell has offered political advice to Trump. He has not worked directly for the President, but at least as far back as 2013 he has been a contractor for one of Trump’s biggest financial backers: Robert Mercer, a reclusive Long Island hedge-fund manager, who has become a major force behind the Trump Presidency.

During the past decade, Mercer, who is seventy, has funded an array of political projects that helped pave the way for Trump’s rise. Among these efforts was public-opinion research, conducted by Caddell, showing that political conditions in America were increasingly ripe for an outsider candidate to take the White House. Caddell told me that Mercer “is a libertarian—he *despises* the Republican establishment,” and added, “He thinks that the leaders are corrupt crooks, and that they’ve ruined the country.”

Trump greeted Caddell warmly in North Charleston, and after giving a speech he conferred privately with him, in an area reserved for V.I.P.s and for White House officials, including Stephen Bannon, the President’s top strategist, and

Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law. Caddell is well known to this inner circle. He first met Trump in the eighties. (“People said he was just a clown,” Caddell said. “But I’ve learned that you should always pay attention to successful ‘clowns.’”) Caddell shared the research he did for Mercer with Trump and others in the campaign, including Bannon, with whom he has partnered on numerous projects.

The White House declined to divulge what Trump and Caddell discussed in North Charleston, as did Caddell. But that afternoon Trump issued perhaps the most incendiary statement of his Presidency: a tweet calling the news media “the enemy of the American people.” The proclamation alarmed liberals and conservatives alike. William McRaven, the retired Navy admiral who commanded the 2011 raid that killed Osama bin Laden, called Trump’s statement a “threat to democracy.” The President is known for tweeting impulsively, but in this case his words weren’t spontaneous: they clearly echoed the thinking of Caddell, Bannon, and Mercer. In 2012, Caddell gave a speech at a conference sponsored by Accuracy in Media, a conservative watchdog group, in which he called the media “the enemy of the American people.” That declaration was promoted by Breitbart News, a platform for the pro-Trump alt-right, of which Bannon was the executive chairman, before joining the Trump Administration. One of the main stakeholders in Breitbart News is Mercer.

Mercer is the co-C.E.O. of Renaissance Technologies, which is among the most profitable hedge funds in the country. A brilliant computer scientist, he helped transform the financial industry through the innovative use of trading algorithms. But he has never given an interview explaining his political views. Although Mercer has recently become an object of media speculation, Trevor Potter, the president of the Campaign Legal Center, a nonpartisan watchdog group,

who formerly served as the chairman of the Federal Election Commission, said, “I have no idea what his political views are—they’re unknown, not just to the public but also to most people who’ve been active in politics for the past thirty years.” Potter, a Republican, sees Mercer as emblematic of a major shift in American politics that has occurred since 2010, when the Supreme Court made a controversial ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. That ruling, and several subsequent ones, removed virtually all limits on how much money corporations and nonprofit groups can spend on federal elections, and how much individuals can give to political-action committees. Since then, power has tilted away from the two main political parties and toward a tiny group of rich mega-donors.

Private money has long played a big role in American elections. When there were limits on how much a single donor could give, however, it was much harder for an individual to have a decisive impact. Now, Potter said, “a single billionaire can write an eight-figure check and put not just their thumb but their whole hand on the scale—and we often have no idea who they are.” He continued, “Suddenly, a random billionaire can change politics and public policy—to sweep everything else off the table—even if they don’t speak publicly, and even if there’s almost no public awareness of his or her views.”

Through a spokesman, Mercer declined to discuss his role in launching Trump. People who know him say that he is painfully awkward socially, and rarely speaks. “He can barely look you in the eye when he talks,” an acquaintance said. “It’s probably helpful to be highly introverted when getting lost in code, but in politics you have to talk to people, in order to find out how the real world works.” In 2010, when the *Wall Street Journal* wrote about Mercer assuming a top role at Renaissance, he issued a terse

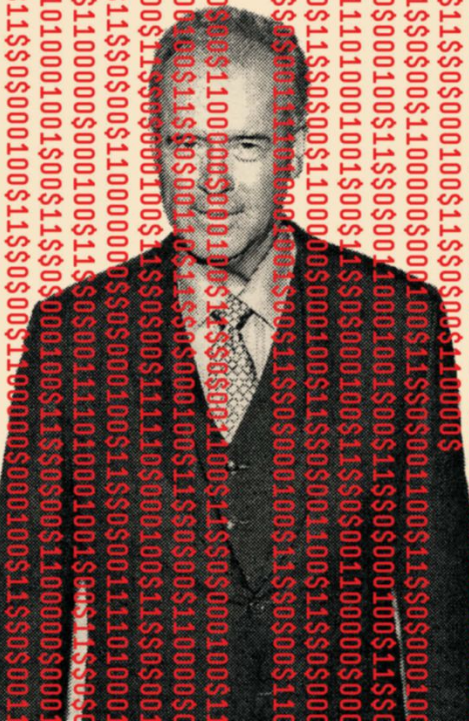


ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVER MUNDAY

statement: "I'm happy going through my life without saying anything to anybody." According to the paper, he once told a colleague that he preferred the company of cats to humans.

Several people who have worked with Mercer believe that, despite his oddities, he has had surprising success in aligning the Republican Party, and consequently America, with his personal beliefs, and is now uniquely positioned to exert influence over the Trump Administration. In February, David Magerman, a senior employee at Renaissance, spoke out about what he regards as Mercer's worrisome influence. Magerman, a Democrat who is a strong supporter of Jewish causes, took particular issue with Mercer's empowerment of the alt-right, which has included anti-Semitic and white-supremacist voices. Magerman shared his concerns with Mercer, and the conversation escalated into an argument. Magerman told colleagues about it, and, according to an account in the *Wall Street Journal*, Mercer called Magerman and said, "I hear you're going around saying I'm a white supremacist. That's ridiculous." Magerman insisted to Mercer that he hadn't used those words, but added, "If what you're doing is harming the country, then you have to stop." After the *Journal* story appeared, Magerman, who has worked at Renaissance for twenty years, was suspended for thirty days. Undaunted, he published an op-ed in the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, accusing Mercer of "effectively buying shares in

the candidate." He warned, "Robert Mercer now owns a sizeable share of the United States Presidency."

Nick Patterson, a former senior Renaissance employee who is now a computational biologist at the Broad Institute, agrees that Mercer's influence has been huge. "Bob has used his money very effectively," he said. "He's not the first person in history to use money in politics, but in my view Trump wouldn't be President if not for Bob. It doesn't get much more effective than that."

Patterson said that his relationship with Mercer has always been collegial. In 1993, Patterson, at that time a Renaissance executive, recruited Mercer from I.B.M., and they worked together for the next eight years. But Patterson doesn't share Mercer's libertarian views, or what he regards as his susceptibility to conspiracy theories about Bill and Hillary Clinton. During Bill Clinton's Presidency, Patterson recalled, Mercer insisted at a staff luncheon that Clinton had participated in a secret drug-running scheme with the C.I.A. The plot supposedly operated out of an airport in Mena, Arkansas. "Bob told me he believed that the Clintons were involved in murders connected to it," Patterson said. Two other sources told me that, in recent years, they had heard Mercer claim that the Clintons have had opponents murdered.

The Mena story is one of several dark fantasies put forth in the nineties by *The American Spectator*, an archconservative magazine. According to Patterson, Mer-

cer read the publication at the time. David Brock, a former *Spectator* writer who is now a liberal activist, told me that the alleged Mena conspiracy was based on a single dubious source, and was easily disproved by flight records. "It's extremely telling that Mercer would believe that," Brock said. "It says something about his conspiratorial frame of mind, and the fringe circle he was in. We at the *Spectator* called them Clinton Crazies."

Patterson also recalled Mercer arguing that, during the Gulf War, the U.S. should simply have taken Iraq's oil, "since it was there." Trump, too, has said that the U.S. should have "kept the oil." Expropriating another country's natural resources is a violation of international law. Another onetime senior employee at Renaissance recalls hearing Mercer downplay the dangers posed by nuclear war. Mercer, speaking of the atomic bombs that the U.S. dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, argued that, outside of the immediate blast zones, the radiation actually made Japanese citizens healthier. The National Academy of Sciences has found no evidence to support this notion. Nevertheless, according to the onetime employee, Mercer, who is a proponent of nuclear power, "was very excited about the idea, and felt that it meant nuclear accidents weren't such a big deal."

Mercer strongly supported the nomination of Jeff Sessions to be Trump's Attorney General. Many civil-rights groups opposed the nomination, pointing out that Sessions has in the past expressed racist views. Mercer, for his part, has argued that the Civil Rights Act, in 1964, was a major mistake. According to the onetime Renaissance employee, Mercer has asserted repeatedly that African-Americans were better off economically before the civil-rights movement. (Few scholars agree.) He has also said that the problem of racism in America is exaggerated. The source said that, not long ago, he heard Mercer proclaim that there are no white racists in America today, only black racists. (Mercer, meanwhile, has supported a super PAC, Black Americans for a Better Future, whose goal is to "get more Blacks involved in the Republican Party.")

"Most people at Renaissance didn't challenge him" about politics, Patterson said. But Patterson clashed with him over climate change; Mercer said that



concerns about it were overblown. After Patterson shared with him a scientific paper on the subject, Mercer and his brother, Randall, who also worked at the hedge fund, sent him a paper by a scientist named Arthur Robinson, who is a biochemist, not a climate expert. “It *looked* like a scientific paper, but it was completely loaded with selective and biased information,” Patterson recalled. The paper argued that, if climate change were real, future generations would “enjoy an Earth with far more plant and animal life.” Robinson owns a sheep ranch in Cave Junction, Oregon, and on the property he runs a laboratory that he calls the Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine. Mercer helps subsidize Robinson’s various projects, which include an effort to forestall aging.

Patterson sent Mercer a note calling Robinson’s arguments “completely false.” He never heard back. “I think if you studied Bob’s views of what the ideal state would look like, you’d find that, basically, he wants a system where the state just gets out of the way,” Patterson said. “Climate change poses a problem for that world view, because markets can’t solve it on their own.”

Magerman told the *Wall Street Journal* that Mercer’s political opinions “show contempt for the social safety net that he doesn’t need, but many Americans do.” He also said that Mercer wants the U.S. government to be “shrunk down to the size of a pinhead.” Several former colleagues of Mercer’s said that his views are akin to Objectivism, the philosophy of Ayn Rand. Magerman told me, “Bob believes that human beings have no inherent value other than how much money they make. A cat has value, he’s said, because it provides pleasure to humans. But if someone is on welfare they have negative value. If he earns a thousand times more than a schoolteacher, then he’s a thousand times more valuable.” Magerman added, “He thinks society is upside down—that government helps the weak people get strong, and makes the strong people weak by taking their money away, through taxes.” He said that this mind-set was typical of “instant billionaires” in finance, who “have no stake in society,” unlike the industrialists of the past, who “built real things.”

Another former high-level Renaissance employee said, “Bob thinks the less

government the better. He’s happy if people don’t trust the government. And if the President’s a bozo? He’s fine with that. He wants it to *all* fall down.”

The 2016 Presidential election posed a challenge for someone with Mercer’s ideology. Multiple sources described him as animated mainly by hatred of Hillary Clinton. But Mercer also distrusted the Republican leadership. After the candidate he initially supported, Senator Ted Cruz, of Texas, dropped out of the race, Mercer sought a disruptive figure who could upend both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Patterson told me that Mercer seems to have applied “a very Renaissance Technologies way of thinking” to politics: “He probably estimated the probability of Trump winning, and when it wasn’t very high he said to himself, ‘O.K., what has to happen in order for this twenty-percent thing to occur?’ It’s like playing a card game when you haven’t got a very good hand.”

Mercer, as it happens, is a superb poker player, and his political gamble appears to have paid off. *Institutional Investor* has called it “Robert Mercer’s Trade of the Century.”

IN THE 2016 campaign, Mercer gave \$22.5 million in disclosed donations to Republican candidates and to political-action committees. Tony Fabrizio, a Republican pollster who worked for the Trump campaign, said that Mercer had “catapulted to the top of the heap of right-of-center power brokers.” It’s worth noting that several other wealthy financiers, including Democrats such as Thomas Steyer and Donald Sussman, gave even more money to campaigns. (One of the top Democratic donors was James Simons, the retired founder of Renaissance Technologies.) Nevertheless, Mercer’s political efforts stand apart. Adopting the strategy of Charles and David Koch, the billionaire libertarians, Mercer enlarged his impact exponentially by combining short-term campaign spending with long-term ideological investments. He poured millions of dollars into Breitbart News, and—in what David Magerman has called “an extreme example of modern entrepreneurial philan-

thropy”—made donations to dozens of politically tinged organizations.

Like many wealthy families, the Mercers have a private foundation. At first, the Mercer Family Foundation, which was established in 2004, had an endowment of only half a million dollars, and most of its grants went to medical research and conventional charities. But by 2008, under the supervision of Mercer’s ardently conservative daughter, Rebekah, the foundation began giving millions of dollars to interconnected nonprofit groups, several of which played crucial roles in propagating attacks on Hillary Clinton. By 2015, the most recent year for which federal tax records are avail-

able, the foundation had grown into a \$24.5-million operation that gave large sums to ultraconservative organizations.

On top of this nonprofit spending, Mercer invested in private businesses. He put ten million dollars into Breitbart News, which was conceived as a conservative counterweight to the Huffington Post. The Web site freely mixes right-wing political commentary with juvenile rants and racist innuendo; under Bannon’s direction, the editors introduced a rubric called Black Crime. The site played a key role in undermining Hillary Clinton; by tracking which negative stories about her got the most clicks and “likes,” the editors helped identify which story lines and phrases were the most potent weapons against her. Breitbart News has been a remarkable success: according to ComScore, a company that measures online traffic, the site attracted 19.2 million unique visitors in October.

Mercer also invested some five million dollars in Cambridge Analytica, a firm that mines online data to reach and influence potential voters. The company has said that it uses secret psychological methods to pinpoint which messages are the most persuasive to individual online viewers. The firm, which is the American affiliate of Strategic Communication Laboratories, in London, has worked for candidates whom Mercer has backed, including Trump. It also reportedly worked on the Brexit campaign, in the United Kingdom.

Alexander Nix, the C.E.O. of the firm,



says that it has created “profiles”—consisting of several thousand data points—for two hundred and twenty million Americans. In promotional materials, S.C.L. has claimed to know how to use such data to wage both psychological and political warfare. “Persuading somebody to vote a certain way,” Nix has said publicly, “is really very similar to persuading 14- to 25-year-old boys in Indonesia to not join Al Qaeda.” Some critics suggest that, at this point, Cambridge Analytica’s self-promotion exceeds its effectiveness. But Jonathan Albright, an assistant professor of communications at Elon University, in North Carolina, recently published a paper, on Medium, calling Cambridge Analytica a “propaganda machine.”

As important as Mercer’s business investments is his hiring of advisers. Years before he started supporting Trump, he began funding several conservative activists, including Steve Bannon; as far back as 2012, Bannon was the Mercers’ de-facto political adviser. Some people who have observed the Mercers’ political evolution worry that Bannon has become a Svengali to the whole family, exploiting its political inexperience and tapping its fortune to further his own ambitions. It was Bannon who urged the Mercers to invest in a data-analytics firm. He also encouraged the investment in Breitbart News, which was made through Gravitas Maximus, L.L.C., a front group that once had the same Long Island address as Renaissance Technologies. In an interview, Bannon praised the Mercers’ strategic approach: “The Mercers laid the groundwork for the Trump revolution. Irrefutably, when you look at donors during the past four years, they have had the single biggest impact of anybody, including the Kochs.”

Last summer, Bannon and some other activists whom the Mercers have supported—including David Bossie, who initiated the Citizens United lawsuit—came together to rescue Trump’s wobbly campaign. Sam Nunberg, an early Trump adviser who watched Mercer’s group take over, said, “Mercer was smart. He invested in the right people.”

Bannon and Rebekah Mercer have become particularly close political partners. Last month, when Bannon denounced “the corporatist, globalist media” at the Conservative Political Action Confer-

ence, in his first public appearance since entering the White House, Rebekah Mercer was part of his entourage. Bannon supports some initiatives, such as a major infrastructure program, that are anathema to libertarians such as Robert Mercer. But the *Wall Street Journal* has described Bannon joking and swearing on the deck of the Mercers’ yacht, the Sea Owl, as if he were a member of the family. Bannon assured me that the Mercers, despite all their luxuries, are “the most middle-class people you will ever meet.”

Robert and Diana Mercer brought up their three daughters in a modest home near I.B.M.’s Thomas J. Watson Research Center, in Westchester County. The girls attended public schools, and Robert and Diana worried about paying three college tuitions. According to Donna D’Andrea, a family friend, Diana was a PTA member and a “tiger mom” who “made sure that the girls did all the right things—they were in the honor society, and stayed out of trouble.” D’Andrea recalled Diana saying that Robert was brilliant, but D’Andrea found it hard to tell, because “he was very quiet—he didn’t talk to anybody.”

The eldest Mercer daughter, Jennifer, or Jenji, attended Stanford. Rebekah, the middle daughter, enrolled at Cornell and then transferred to Stanford. Majoring in biology and math, she graduated in 1996; a few years later, she got an M.A., in operations research. The youngest daughter, Heather Sue, “was the spitfire,” D’Andrea recalled. When Heather Sue was a junior in high school, she tried out to be a place kicker on the football team. She made it, and, after enrolling at Duke University, she joined its varsity squad. When the Duke coach refused to treat her as the equal of her male teammates, she sued the school for gender discrimination, and won two million dollars in damages. Ron Santavica, Heather Sue’s high-school coach, described the Mercers, who still invite him to their Christmas parties, as “the salt of the earth.” He added, “The whole family is very determined. When they have a mission, they go after it.”

In 1993, when Nick Patterson mailed Robert Mercer a job offer from Renaissance, Mercer threw it in the trash: he’d never heard of the hedge fund. At the time, Mercer was part of a team pioneering the use of computers to translate lan-

guages. I.B.M. considered the project a bit of a luxury, and didn’t see its potential, though the work laid the foundation for Google Translate and Apple’s Siri. But Mercer and his main partner, Peter Brown, found the project exciting, and had the satisfaction of showing up experts in the field, who had dismissed their statistical approach to translating languages as impractical. Instead of trying to teach a computer linguistic rules, Mercer and Brown downloaded enormous quantities of dual-language documents—including Canadian parliamentary records—and created code that analyzed the data and detected patterns, enabling predictions of probable translations. According to a former I.B.M. colleague, Mercer was obsessive, and at one point took six months off to type into a computer every entry in a Spanish-English dictionary. Sebastian Mallaby, in his 2010 book on the hedge-fund industry, “More Money Than God,” reports that Mercer’s boss at I.B.M. once jokingly called him an “automaton.”

In 2014, Mercer accepted a lifetime-achievement award from the Association for Computational Linguistics. In a speech at the ceremony, Mercer, who grew up in New Mexico, said that he had a “jaundiced view” of government. While in college, he had worked on a military base in Albuquerque, and he had showed his superiors how to run certain computer programs a hundred times faster; instead of saving time and money, the bureaucrats ran a hundred times more equations. He concluded that the goal of government officials was “not so much to get answers as to consume the computer budget.” Mercer’s colleagues say that he views the government as arrogant and inefficient, and believes that individuals need to be self-sufficient, and should not receive aid from the state. Yet, when I.B.M. failed to offer adequate support for Mercer and Brown’s translation project, they secured additional funding from DARPA, the secretive Pentagon program. Despite Mercer’s disdain for “big government,” this funding was essential to his early success.

Meanwhile, Patterson kept asking Mercer and Brown to join Renaissance. He thought that their technique of extracting patterns from huge amounts of data could be applied to the pile of numbers generated daily by the global trade in stocks, bonds, commodities, and

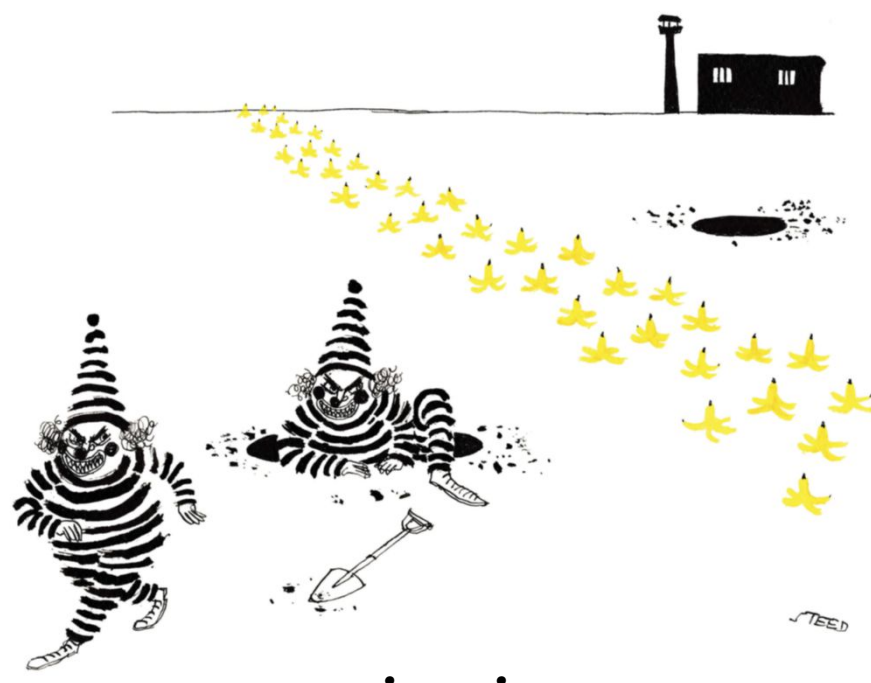
currencies. The patterns could generate predictive financial models that would give traders a decisive edge.

In the spring of 1993, Mercer experienced two devastating losses: his mother was killed, in a car crash, and his father, a biologist, died six weeks later. With life's precariousness made painfully clear, and with tuition bills mounting, he decided to leave I.B.M. for a higher-paying job at Renaissance. Brown made the leap, too.

Renaissance was founded by James Simons, a legendary mathematician, in 1982. Simons had run the math department at Stony Brook University, on Long Island, and the hedge fund took a uniquely academic approach to high finance. Andrew Lo, a finance professor at M.I.T.'s Sloan School of Management, has described it as "the commercial version of the Manhattan Project." Intensely secretive and filled with people with Ph.D.s, it has been sensationally profitable. Its Medallion Fund, which is open only to the firm's three hundred or so employees, has averaged returns of almost eighty per cent a year, before fees. Bloomberg News has called the Medallion Fund "perhaps the world's greatest moneymaking machine."

In "More Money Than God," Malabry, who interviewed Mercer, describes his temperament as that of an "icy cold poker player"; Mercer told him that he could not recall ever having had a nightmare. But Mercer warms up when talking about computers. In the 2014 speech, he recalled the first time he used one, at a science camp, and likened the experience to falling in love. He also spoke of the government lab in New Mexico. "I loved the solitude of the computer lab late at night," he said. "I loved the air-conditioned smell of the place. I loved the sound of the disks whirring and the printers clacking." The speech lasted forty minutes—"more than I typically talk in a month," he noted.

Patterson told me that when Mercer arrived at Renaissance the firm's equities division was lagging behind other areas, such as futures trading. Mercer and Brown applied their algorithms to equities trading. "It took several years," Patterson recalled, but the equities group eventually accounted for the largest share of the Medallion Fund's profits. Mercer and Brown's code took into account nearly every conceivable predictor of market swings; their secret formula became so



valuable that, when a pair of Russian mathematicians at the firm tried to take the recipe elsewhere, the company initiated legal action against them.

Renaissance's profits were further enhanced by a controversial tax maneuver, which became the subject of a 2014 Senate inquiry. According to Senate investigators, Renaissance had presented countless short-term trades as long-term ones, improperly avoiding some \$6.8 billion in taxes. The Senate didn't allege criminality, but it concluded that Renaissance had committed "abuses." The I.R.S. demanded payment. (Renaissance defended its practices, and the matter remains contested, leaving a very sensitive material issue pending before the Trump Administration.)

The Medallion Fund made Renaissance employees among the wealthiest people in the country. *Forbes* estimates that Simons, who has the biggest share, is worth eighteen billion dollars. In 2009, Simons stepped aside, to focus on philanthropy, and named Mercer and Brown co-C.E.O.s. *Institutional Investor's Alpha* estimates that, in 2015, Mercer earned a hundred and thirty-five million dollars at Renaissance.

MERCER'S FORTUNE HAS allowed him and his family to indulge their wildest material fantasies. He and Diana moved into a waterfront estate in Head of the Harbor, a seaside community on

Long Island, and called the property Owl's Nest. Mercer, a gun enthusiast, built a private pistol range there. (He is also a part owner of Centre Firearms, a company that claims to have the country's largest private cache of machine guns, as well as a weapon that Arnold Schwarzenegger wielded in "The Terminator.") At Owl's Nest, Mercer has installed a \$2.7-million model-train set in his basement; trains chug through a miniature landscape half the size of a basketball court. The toy train attracted unwanted tabloid headlines, such as "BOO-HOO OVER 2M CHOO-CHOO," after Mercer sued the manufacturer for overcharging him. (The case was settled.)

Mercer retains a domestic staff that includes a butler and a physician; both accompany him whenever he travels. But this, too, has sparked bad publicity. In 2013, three members of the household staff sued to recover back wages, claiming that Mercer had failed to pay overtime, as promised, and that he had deducted pay as punishment for poor work. One infraction that Mercer cited as a "demerit" was a failure to replace shampoo bottles that were two-thirds empty. This suit, too, was settled.

Mercer has bought several spectacular yachts, including the Sea Owl, which is two hundred and three feet long. A 2013 photo shows the gates of the Tower Bridge, in London, raised high to allow it to proceed up the Thames. The Sea

Owl has a crew of eighteen, and features a hand-carved “tree” that twists through four levels of decks. Designed, in part, as a place where the extended Mercer family can gather, the yacht has many fanciful and didactic touches for the Mercer grandchildren, such as frescoes that allude to the discoveries of Darwin and Newton. There’s a self-playing Steinway, a spa pool, and an elevator.

Mercer has given major credit to his family for the yacht’s special details, telling *Boat International* that they are “endowed with both exceptionally good taste and exceptionally strong opinions.” The Mercer daughters are indeed forceful. When a Manhattan bakery that the sisters loved, Ruby et Violette, threatened to close, depriving the Mercers of their favorite cookies, they bought it. In a Fox News interview, Heather Sue recalled telling the others, “We are going to buy a bakery!” The Mercers still own the business, although it is now online-only.

After graduating from Duke, Heather Sue began competing in high-stakes poker tournaments; she is admired on the circuit for her cool manner. When Mercer insisted that Heather Sue take a security guard with her, Santavicca said, “they became friends, then they became whatever, and now they’re married, with two beautiful daughters.”

Jenji has a law degree from Georgetown, but she has pursued an interest in horses instead. In 2008, the Mercers bought a horse farm in Wellington, Flor-

ida, for \$5.9 million. Jenji and Diana regularly attend the Winter Equestrian Festival, in Palm Beach. They are investors in an equestrian center in North Carolina, and have announced plans to open one in Colorado. Diana is also listed as the owner of Equinimity, a horse stable in Florida. According to the stable’s Web site, it specializes in Equine Facilitated Learning, a system that teaches “non-verbal leadership and interpersonal communication skills through non-predatory horse-inspired wisdom.”

Rebekah worked for a few years at Renaissance after graduating from Stanford. A former colleague recalls her as smart but haughty. In 2003, she married a Frenchman, Sylvain Mirochnikoff, who is a managing director of Morgan Stanley. They had four children and bought a twenty-eight-million-dollar property—six apartments joined together—at Trump Place, on the Upper West Side. Now forty-three, she is divorcing Mirochnikoff. She homeschools the children, but in recent years she has become consumed by politics. “She is the First Lady of the alt-right,” Christopher Ruddy, the owner of the conservative outlet Newsmax Media, said. “She’s respected in conservative circles, and clearly Trump has embraced her in a big way.”

Amity Shlaes, the conservative writer and the chair of the Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation, where Rebekah Mercer is a trustee, told me, “In the dull crowds of policy, the Mercers are en-

chanting firecrackers.” She likened the Mercer sisters to the Schuylers—the high-spirited, witty sisters made famous by the musical “Hamilton.” Shlaes went on, “The Mercers have strong values, they’re kind of funny, and they’re really bright. Their brains are almost too strong.” Rebekah, she noted, supports several think tanks, but grows tired of talk; she “is into action.”

AFTER THE Citizens United decision, in 2010, the Mercers were among the first people to take advantage of the opportunity to spend more money on politics. In Oregon, they quietly gave money to a super PAC—an independent campaign-related group that could now take unlimited donations. In New York, reporters discovered that Robert Mercer was the sole donor behind a million-dollar advertising campaign attacking what it described as a plan to build a “Ground Zero Mosque” in Manhattan. The proposed building was neither a mosque nor at Ground Zero. The ads, which were meant to boost a Conservative Party candidate for governor, were condemned as Islamophobic.

In Oregon, the Mercers gave six hundred and forty thousand dollars to a group that attacked Representative Peter DeFazio, a Democrat, with a barrage of negative ads during the final weeks of his 2010 reelection campaign. This effort also failed—it didn’t help when DeFazio announced that a New York hedge-fund manager and his daughter were meddling in Oregon politics.

Press accounts speculated that Robert Mercer may have targeted DeFazio because DeFazio had proposed a tax on a type of high-volume stock trade that Renaissance frequently made. But several associates of Mercer’s say that the truth is stranger. DeFazio’s Republican opponent was Arthur Robinson—the biochemist, sheep rancher, and climate-change denialist. The Mercers became his devoted supporters after reading *Access to Energy*, an offbeat scientific newsletter that he writes. The family has given at least \$1.6 million in donations to Robinson’s Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine. Some of the money was used to buy freezers in which Robinson is storing some fourteen thousand samples of human urine. Robinson has said that, by studying the urine,



A BAT UNSUCCESSFULLY TOSSES PIZZA DOUGH

he will find new ways of extending the human life span.

Robinson holds a degree in chemistry from Caltech, but his work is not respected in most scientific circles. (The Oregon senator Jeff Merkley, a Democrat, has called Robinson an “extremist kook.”) Robinson appears to be the source of Robert Mercer’s sanguine view of nuclear radiation: in 1986, Robinson co-authored a book suggesting that the vast majority of Americans would survive “an all-out atomic attack on the United States.” Robinson’s institute dismisses climate change as a “false religion.” A petition that he organized in 1998 to oppose the Kyoto Protocol, claiming to represent thirty thousand scientists skeptical of global warming, has been criticized as deceptive. The National Academy of Sciences has warned that the petition never appeared in a peer-reviewed journal, though it is printed in “a format that is nearly identical to that of scientific articles.” The petition, however, still circulates online: in the past year, it was the most shared item about climate change on Facebook.

Robinson, who calls himself a “Jesus-plus-nothing-else” Christian, has become a hero to the religious right for homeschooling his six children. Robert and Rebekah Mercer have praised a curriculum that Robinson sells. (An advertisement for it casts doubt on evolution: “No demonstration has ever been made of the process of ‘spontaneous origin of life.’”) Robinson has said that the “socialist” agenda of public schools is “evil” and represents “a form of child abuse.”

EVEN THOUGH 2010 was a successful election year for Republicans, the candidates that the Mercers had supported in Oregon and New York both lost decisively. Their investments had achieved nothing. Wealthy political donors sometimes make easy marks for campaign operatives. Patrick Caddell, the former pollster, told me, “These people who get so rich by running businesses get so taken in when it comes to politics. They’re just sheep. The consultants suck it out of them. A lot of them are surrounded by palace guards, but that’s not true of the Mercers.”

By 2011, the Mercers had joined forces with Charles and David Koch, who own Koch Industries, and who

have run a powerful political machine for decades. The Mercers attended the Kochs’ semiannual seminars, which provide a structure for right-wing millionaires looking for effective ways to channel their cash. The Mercers admired the savviness of the Kochs’ plan, which called for attendees to pool their contributions in a fund run by Koch operatives. The fund would strategically deploy the money in races across the country, although, at the time, the Kochs’ chief aim was to defeat Barack Obama in 2012. The Kochs will not reveal the identities of their donors, or the size of contributions, but the Mercers reportedly began giving at least a million dollars a year to the Kochs’ fund. Eventually, they contributed more than twenty-five million.

The Mercers also joined the Council for National Policy, which the *Times* has described as a “little-known club of a few hundred of the most powerful conservatives in the country.” The Mercers have contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars. The group swears participants to secrecy. But a leaked 2014 roster revealed that it included many people who promoted anti-Clinton conspiracy stories, including Joseph Farah, the editor of *WorldNetDaily*. The group also brought the Mercers into the orbit of two people who have become key figures in the Trump White House: Kellyanne Conway, who was on the group’s executive committee, and Steve Bannon.

In 2011, the Mercers met Andrew Breitbart, the founder of the fiery news outlet that bears his name, at a conference organized by the Club for Growth, a conservative group. They were so impressed by him that they became interested in investing in his operation. Breitbart, a gleefully offensive provocateur, was the temperamental opposite of Robert Mercer. (In 2010, Breitbart told this magazine, “I like to call someone a raving cunt every now and then, when it’s appropriate, for effect.”) Nevertheless, the Mercers were attracted to Breitbart’s vision of “taking back the culture” by building a media enterprise that could wage information warfare against the mainstream press, empowering what Breitbart called “the silenced majority.”



Breitbart soon introduced the Mercers to Steve Bannon. For a while, Breitbart News operated out of office space that Bannon owned in Santa Monica. A Harvard Business School graduate, Bannon had worked at Goldman Sachs, but he eventually left the world of finance and began making political films. His ambition, apparently, was to become the Michael Moore of the right. In the aughts, he directed polemical documentaries, among them “Fire from the Heartland” and “District of Corruption.” A former associate of Bannon’s in California recalls him as a strategic thinker who was adept at manipulating the media. A voracious reader, he was quick and charming, but, according to the former

associate, he had a chip on his shoulder about class. He often spoke of having grown up in a blue-collar Irish Catholic family in Richmond, Virginia, and of having served as a naval officer when he was young. Bannon seemed to feel excluded from the social world of Wall Street peers who had attended prep schools. He had left Goldman Sachs, in 1990, without making partner, and, though he was well off, he had missed out on the gigantic profits that partners had made when the company went public, in 1999.

In 2011, Bannon drafted a business plan for the Mercers that called for them to invest ten million dollars in Breitbart News, in exchange for a large stake. At the time, the Breitbart site was little more than a collection of blogs. The Mercers signed the deal that June, and one of its provisions placed Bannon on the company’s board.

Nine months later, Andrew Breitbart died, at forty-three, of a heart attack, and Bannon became the site’s executive chairman, overseeing its content. The Mercers, meanwhile, became Bannon’s principal patrons. The *Washington Post* recently published a house-rental lease that Bannon signed in 2013, on which he said that his salary at Breitbart News was seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Under Bannon’s leadership, the Web site expanded dramatically, adding a fleet of full-time writers. It became a new force on the right, boosting extreme insurgents against the G.O.P. establishment, such as David Brat, who, in 2014,

took the seat of Eric Cantor, the Virginia congressman. But it also provided a public forum for previously shunned white-nationalist, sexist, and racist voices. One pundit hired by Bannon was Milo Yiannopoulos, who specialized in puerile insults. (He recently resigned from the site, after a video of him lewdly defending pederasty went viral.)

In 2014, Bannon began hosting a radio show that often featured Patrick Caddell, who effectively had been banished by Democratic Party leaders after years of tempestuous campaigns and fallings-out. On the air, Caddell floated dark theories about Hillary Clinton, and often sounded a lot like Bannon, describing “economic nationalism” as the driving force in American politics. Under Barack Obama, he said, America had turned into a “banana republic.”

By 2016, Breitbart News claims, it had the most shared political content on Facebook, giving the Mercers a platform that no other conservative donors could match. Rebekah Mercer is highly engaged with Breitbart’s content. An insider there said, “She reads every story, and calls when there are grammatical errors or typos.” Though she doesn’t dictate a political line to the editors, she often points out areas of coverage that she thinks require more attention. Her views about the Washington establishment, including the Republican leadership, are scathing. “She was at the avant-garde of shuttering both political parties,” the insider at Breitbart said. “She went a long way toward the redefinition of American politics.”

The Mercers’ investment in Breitbart enabled Bannon to promote anti-establishment politicians whom the mainstream media dismissed, including Trump. In 2011, David Bossie, the head of the conservative group Citizens United, introduced Trump to Bannon; at the time, Trump was thinking about running against Obama. Bannon and Trump met at Trump Tower and discussed a possible campaign. Trump decided against the idea, but the two kept in touch, and Bannon gave Trump admiring coverage. Bannon noticed that, when Trump spoke to crowds, people were electrified. Bannon began to think that Trump might be “the one” who could shake up American politics.

“Breitbart gave Trump a big role,”

Sam Nunberg, the aide who worked on the early stages of Trump’s campaign, has said. “They gave us an outlet. No one else would. It allowed us to define our narrative and communicate our message. It really started with the birther thing”—Trump’s false claim that Obama was not born an American citizen—“and then immigration, and Iran. Trump was developing his message.” By 2013, Nunberg said, Trump, like others on Breitbart, was “hitting the establishment” by slamming the Republican leadership in Congress, including Paul Ryan. Nunberg added, “It wasn’t like Charlie Rose was asking us on.”

THE MERCER FAMILY FOUNDATION kept expanding its political investments. Between 2011 and 2014, it gave nearly eleven million dollars to the Media Research Center, an advocacy group whose “sole mission,” according to its Web site, “is to expose and neutralize the propaganda arm of the Left: the national news media.” The group’s founder, L. Brent Bozell III, is best known for his successful campaign to get CBS sanctioned for showing Janet Jackson’s bared breast during the 2004 Super Bowl broadcast. The Mercers have been among the M.R.C.’s biggest donors, and their money has allowed the group to revamp its news site, and it now claims to reach more than two hundred million Americans a week.

In 2012, the Mercer Family Foundation donated two million dollars to Citizens United, which had trafficked in Clinton hatred for years. During the



Clinton Administration, David Bossie, the group’s leader, was a Republican congressional aide, and he was forced to resign after releasing misleading material about a Clinton associate. In 2008, Citizens United released a vitriolic film, “Hillary: The Movie.” Two years ago, after the group received an additional five hundred and fifty thousand dollars from the Mercers’ foundation, it filed a

Freedom of Information Act request demanding access to Hillary Clinton’s State Department e-mails. When the e-mails were released, her Presidential campaign became mired in negative news stories.

Bannon has often collaborated with Bossie, producing half a dozen films with him. In 2012, Bossie suggested a new joint project: a movie that urged Democrats and independents to abandon Obama in the Presidential election. The film’s approach was influenced by polling work that Patrick Caddell had shared with Bannon. The data suggested that attacking Obama was counterproductive; it was more effective to express “disappointment” in him, by contrasting him with earlier Presidents.

Caddell and Bannon made an unholy alliance, but they had things in common: both men were Irish Catholic sons of the South, scourges to their respective parties, and prone to apocalyptic pronouncements. “We hit it off right away,” Caddell told me. “We’re both revolutionaries.” Bannon was excited by Caddell’s polling research, and he persuaded Citizens United to hire Caddell to convene focus groups of disillusioned Obama supporters. Many of these voters became the central figures of “The Hope & the Change,” an anti-Obama film that Bannon and Citizens United released during the 2012 Democratic National Convention. After Caddell saw the film, he pointed out to Bannon that its opening imitated that of “Triumph of the Will,” the 1935 ode to Hitler, made by the Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl. Bannon laughed and said, “You’re the only one that caught it!” In both films, a plane flies over a blighted land, as ominous music swells; then clouds in the sky part, auguring a new era. The disappointed voters in the film “seared into me,” Bannon said, the fact that middle-class Americans badly wanted change, and could be lured away from the Democratic Party if they felt that they had been conned.

In 2012, Citizens United’s foundation paid Bannon Strategic Advisors, a consultancy group founded by Bannon, three hundred thousand dollars for what it described to the I.R.S. as “fund-raising” services. Bossie told me that the tax filing must have been made in error: the payment was actually for Bannon’s “film development” work. Charitable groups are barred from spending tax-deductible contributions on partisan politics, yet, as

VISITING THE GRAVE

We visit your grave on week-days, you who dressed
the ordinary week-day in its Sunday best
and the week-day heart of Sunday taking its rest.

—Frank Ormsby

Breitbart News noted at the time, “The Hope & the Change” was a “partisan” film “targeting Democrats” during an election year. Even so, the Mercers took a hefty tax deduction for their two-million-dollar donation to Citizens United.

Bossie told me that “the Mercers are very interested in films.” Indeed, Rebekah Mercer is on the board of the Moving Picture Institute, a conservative group devoted to countering Hollywood liberalism with original online entertainment. Among its recent projects was a cartoon, “Everyone Coughs,” which spread the rumor that Hillary Clinton was mortally ill. The film ended by depicting an animated Clinton literally coughing herself to death.

ON ELECTION NIGHT in 2012, the Mercers and other top conservative donors settled into the V.I.P. section of a Republican Party victory celebration, having been assured that their investments would pay off. Obama’s defeat of Mitt Romney particularly infuriated Rebekah Mercer, who concluded that the pollsters, the data crunchers, and the spin doctors were all frauds. Soon afterward, Republican Party officials invited big donors to the University Club, in New York, for a postmortem on the election. Attendees were stunned when Rebekah Mercer “ripped the shit out of them,” a friend of hers told me, adding, “It was really her coming out.” As the *Financial Times* has reported, from that point on Mercer wanted to know exactly how her donations were being spent, and wanted to invest only in what another friend described as “things that she thinks put lead on the target.”

That year, Rebekah Mercer joined the board of the Government Accountability Institute, a nonprofit group, based in Tallahassee, which Bannon had recently founded. In 2013, the Mercer Family Foundation contributed a million dollars

to the institute, and in 2014 it contributed another million. In 2015, it donated \$1.7 million, which exceeded the group’s entire budget the previous year. The G.A.I., meanwhile, paid Bannon three hundred and seventy-six thousand dollars during its first four years; it told the I.R.S. that Bannon was working for it thirty hours a week, ostensibly on top of his full-time job running Breitbart News.

The G.A.I. billed itself as a nonpartisan research institute, but in 2015 Bannon told *Bloomberg Businessweek* that its mission was to dig up dirt on politicians and feed it to the mainstream media. (A G.A.I. staffer called this “weaponizing” information.) The group reportedly hired an expert to comb the Deep Web—sites that don’t show up in standard searches—for incriminating information about its targets. The plan was to exploit the mainstream media’s growing inability to finance investigative reporting by doing it for them. The strategy paid off spectacularly in April, 2015, when the *Times* ran a front-page article based on the book “Clinton Cash,” a compendium of corruption allegations against the Clintons, which was written by the G.A.I.’s president, the conservative writer Peter Schweizer. (The G.A.I. had given the paper an advance copy.) The book triggered one story after another about Hillary Clinton’s supposed criminality, and became a best-seller. In 2016, a film version, co-produced by Bannon and Rebekah Mercer, debuted at the Cannes Film Festival, as the Mercers’ yacht bobbed offshore.

The G.A.I. also undermined Jeb Bush, the candidate favored by the Republican establishment, with another Schweizer book, “Bush Bucks.” As Bannon put it in a 2015 interview, it depicted Bush as a figure of “grimy, low-energy crony capitalism.”

During this period, the Mercers continued giving money to election cam-

paigns. In 2014, Robert Mercer made a two-and-a-half-million-dollar contribution to the Kochs’ Freedom Partners Action Fund. This exceeded the two-million-dollar contributions of David and Charles Koch, prompting a memorable headline about Mercer from Bloomberg News: “THE MAN WHO OUTKOCHED THE KOCHS.”

Rebekah Mercer, meanwhile, was growing impatient with the Kochs. She felt that they needed to investigate why their network had failed to defeat Obama in 2012. Instead, the Kochs gathered donors and presented them with more empty rhetoric. Mercer demanded an accounting of what had gone wrong, and when they ignored her she decided to start her own operation. In a further blow, Mercer soured several other top donors on the Kochs.

In 2012, one area in which the Republicans had lagged badly behind the Democrats was in the use of digital analytics. The Mercers decided to finance their own big-data project. In 2014, Michal Kosinski, a researcher in the psychology department at the University of Cambridge, was working in the emerging field of psychometrics, the quantitative study of human characteristics. He learned from a colleague that a British company, Strategic Communication Laboratories, wanted to hire academics to pursue similar research, for commercial purposes. Kosinski had circulated personality tests on Facebook and, in the process, obtained huge amounts of information about users. From this data, algorithms could be fashioned that would predict people’s behavior and anticipate their reactions to other online prompts. Those who took the Facebook quizzes, however, had been promised that the information would be used strictly for academic purposes. Kosinski felt that repurposing it for commercial use was unethical, and possibly illegal. His concerns deepened when he researched S.C.L. He was disturbed to learn that the company specialized in psychological warfare, and in influencing elections. He spurned the chance to work with S.C.L., although his colleague signed a contract with the company.

Kosinski was further disconcerted when he learned that a new American affiliate of S.C.L., Cambridge Analytica—owned principally by an American

hedge-fund tycoon named Robert Mercer—was attempting to influence elections in the U.S. Kosinski, who is now an assistant professor of organizational behavior at Stanford's business school, supports the idea of using psychometric data to “nudge” people toward socially positive behavior, such as voting. But, he told me, “there’s a thin line between convincing people and manipulating them.”

It is unclear if the Mercers have pushed Cambridge Analytica to cross that line. A company spokesman declined to comment for this story. What is clear is that Mercer, having revolutionized the use of data on Wall Street, was eager to accomplish the same feat in the political realm. He screened many data-mining companies before investing, and he chose Cambridge Analytica, in part, because its high concentration of accomplished scientists reminded him of Renaissance Technologies. Rebekah Mercer, too, has been deeply involved in the venture. Cambridge Analytica shares a corporate address in Manhattan with a group she chairs, Reclaim New York, which opposes government spending. (Bannon has reportedly served as a corporate officer for both Reclaim and Cambridge Analytica.)

Political scientists and consultants continue to debate Cambridge Analytica's record in the 2016 campaign. David Karpf, an assistant professor at George Washington University who studies the political use of data, calls the firm's claim to have special psychometric powers “a marketing pitch” that’s “untrue.” Karpf worries, though, that the company “could take a very dark turn.” He explained, “What they could do is set up a Move-On-style operation with a Tea Party-ish list that they could whip up. Typically, lists like that are used to pressure elected officials, but the dangerous thing would be if it was used instead to pressure fellow-citizens. It could encourage vigilantism.” Karpf said of Cambridge Analytica, “There is a maximalist scenario in which we should be terrified to have a tool like this in private hands.”

Cambridge Analytica is not the only data-driven political project that the Mercers have backed. In 2013, at a conservative conference in Palm Beach, an oil tycoon named William Lee Hanley, who had commissioned some polls from Patrick Caddell, asked him to show the

data to Mercer and Bannon, who were at the event. The data showed mounting anger toward wealthy elites, who many Americans believed had corrupted the government so that it served only their interests. There was a hunger for a populist Presidential candidate who would run against the major political parties and the ruling class. The data “showed that someone could just walk into this election and sweep it,” Caddell told me. When Mercer saw the numbers, he asked for the polling to be repeated. Caddell got the same results. “It was stunning,” he said. “The country was on the verge of an uprising against its leaders. I just fell over!”

Until Election Day in 2016, Mercer and Hanley—two of the richest men in America—paid Caddell to keep collecting polling data that enabled them to exploit the public's resentment of elites such as themselves. Caddell's original goal was to persuade his sponsors to back an independent candidate, but they never did. In 2014, Caddell and two partners went public with what they called the Candidate Smith project, which promoted data suggesting that the public wanted a “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” figure—an outsider—as President. During the next year or so, Caddell's poll numbers tilted more and more away from the establishment. Caddell's partner Bob Perkins, an advertising executive and a former finance director of the Republican Party, told me, “By then, it was clear there wouldn't be a third-party candidate. But we thought that a Republican who harnessed the angst had a real chance.” At one point, Caddell tested all the declared Presidential candidates, including Trump, as a possible Mr. Smith. “People didn't think Trump had the temperament to be President,” Caddell said. “He clearly wasn't the best Smith, but he was the *only* Smith. He was the only one with the resources and the name recognition.” As Bernie Sanders's campaign showed, the populist rebellion wasn't partisan. Caddell worried, though, that there were dark undertones in the numbers: Americans were increasingly yearning for a “strong man” to fix the country.

Caddell circulated his research to anyone who would listen, and that included people inside the Trump campaign. “Pat Caddell is like an Old Testament prophet,” Bannon said. “He's been

talking about alienation of the voters for twenty-five years, and people didn't pay attention—but he's a brilliant guy, and he nailed it.” The political consultant and strategist Roger Stone, who is a longtime Trump confidant, was fascinated by the research, and he forwarded a memo about it to Trump. Caddell said that he spoke with Trump about “some of the data,” but noted, “With Trump, it's all instinct—he is not exactly a deep-dive thinker.”

Robert Mercer, too, was kept informed. Perkins said, “He just loves the numbers. Most people say, ‘Tell me what you think—don't show me the numbers.’ But he's, like, ‘Give me the numbers!’”

During the 2016 campaign, as the Mercers considered which Presidential candidate to back, they rejected insiders such as Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio, who they believed couldn't win. They initially gravitated toward Ted Cruz, in part because he was an outsider in the Senate—loathed by even his Republican peers. During the primaries, the Mercers gave eleven million dollars to a super PAC supporting Cruz, run by Kellyanne Conway. According to Politico, Rebekah Mercer soon “wore out her welcome” with the Cruz campaign by offering withering appraisals of his debate performances. She also insisted that the campaign hire Cambridge Analytica, even though Cruz campaign officials were skeptical of it.

After Cruz dropped out, many Republicans—including Cruz himself—recoiled from Trump. The Mercers, however, joined the Trump camp, and publicly rebuked Cruz, giving a statement to the *Times*. If Clinton won, the Mercers claimed, she would “repeal both the First and Second Amendments of the Bill of Rights.” Given the stakes, they said, “all hands” were “needed on deck” in order to insure a Trump victory. Cruz, they noted, had “chosen to stay in his bunk below.”

The Mercers redirected their Cruz super PAC to support Trump, and gave two million dollars to it. According to one Trump adviser, there were strings attached to the donation. He says that, two weeks before Cruz dropped out, Bannon urged the Trump campaign to talk to Alexander Nix, Cambridge Analytica's C.E.O., about hiring the company. (The previous year, the Trump campaign had rebuffed a pitch from the firm.) The adviser said that Nix followed up and

offered cash inducements, in the form of a “finder’s fee,” to a Trump operative. (A Cambridge Analytica spokesman denied that this occurred.) Paul Manafort, Trump’s campaign manager at the time, said that he knew nothing of Nix’s cash offer but gave Cambridge Analytica a limited contract, though he didn’t see the need, in deference to the Mercers.

Later that summer, Manafort was forced to resign, after the press reported his links to Ukrainian oligarchs. In the vacuum, the Mercers soon established control over the Trump campaign. Rebekah Mercer successfully pushed for a staff shakeup that led to the promotions of three people funded by the family: Bannon became the campaign’s C.E.O., Conway its manager, and Bossie its deputy manager. William Kristol, the editor of *The Weekly Standard* and an adamant Trump opponent, warned, “It’s the merger of the Trump campaign with the kooky right.” But an e-mail that Bannon sent to a friend in 2015, and that was later leaked to the *Daily Beast*, confirms that the elevation of the Mercers and their operatives was, in many ways, a formality. A year before Bannon joined Trump’s campaign staff, he described himself in the e-mail as Trump’s de-facto “campaign manager,” because of the positive coverage that Breitbart was giving Trump. That coverage had largely been underwritten by the Mercers.

Brendan Fischer, a lawyer at the Campaign Legal Center, said that the Mercers’ financial entanglement with the Trump campaign was “bizarre” and potentially “illegal.” The group has filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission, which notes that, at the end of the 2016 campaign, the super PAC run by the Mercers paid Glittering Steel—a film-production company that shares an address in Los Angeles with Cambridge Analytica and Breitbart News—two hundred and eighty thousand dollars, supposedly for campaign ads attacking Hillary Clinton. Although Bannon was running Trump’s campaign, Fischer said that it appears to have paid him nothing. Meanwhile, the Mercers’ super PAC made a payment of about five million dollars to Cambridge Analytica, which was incorporated at the same address as Bannon Strategic Advisors. Super PACs are legally required to stay independent of a candidate’s campaign. But,



“I love a hearty soup.”

Fischer said, “it raises the possibility of the Mercers subsidizing Steve Bannon’s work for the Trump campaign.”

On December 3rd, the Mercer family hosted a victory celebration at Owl’s Nest—a costume party with a heroes-and-villains theme. Rebekah Mercer welcomed several hundred guests, including Donald Trump. In extemporaneous remarks, Trump thanked the Mercers, saying that they had been “instrumental in bringing some organization” to his campaign. He specifically named Bannon, Conway, and Bossie. Trump then joked that he’d just had the longest conversation of his life with Bob Mercer—and it was just “two words.” A guest at the party told me, “I was looking around the room, and I thought, No doubt about it—the people whom the Mercers invested in, my comrades, are now in charge.”

After the election, Rebekah Mercer was rewarded with a seat on Trump’s transition team. “She basically bought herself a seat,” Fischer said. She had strong feelings about who should be nominated to Cabinet positions and other top government jobs. Not all her ideas were embraced. She unsuccessfully pushed for John Bolton, the hawkish former Ambassador to the United Nations, to be named Secretary of State.

So far, her suggestion that Arthur Robinson, the Oregon biochemist, be named the national science adviser has gone nowhere. Like her father, she advocates a return to the gold standard, but as of yet she has failed to get Trump to appoint officials who share this view.

Still, Mercer made her influence felt. Her pick for national-security adviser was Michael Flynn, and Trump chose him for the job. (Flynn lasted only a month, after he lied about having spoken with the Russian Ambassador before taking office.) More important, several people to whom Mercer is very close—including Bannon and Conway—have become some of the most powerful figures in the world.

Rebekah’s father, meanwhile, can no longer be considered a political outsider. David Magerman, in his essay for the *Inquirer*, notes that Mercer “has surrounded our President with *his* people, and his people have an outsized influence over the running of our country, simply because Robert Mercer paid for their seats.” He writes, “Everyone has a right to express their views.” But, he adds, “when the government becomes more like a corporation, with the richest 0.001% buying shares and demanding board seats, then we cease to be a representative democracy.” Instead, he warns, “we become an oligarchy.” ♦

A SCIENCE OF THE SOUL

A philosopher's quest to understand the making of the mind.

BY JOSHUA ROTHMAN

FOUR BILLION YEARS ago, Earth was a lifeless place. Nothing struggled, thought, or wanted. Slowly, that changed. Seawater leached chemicals from rocks; near thermal vents, those chemicals jostled and combined. Some hit upon the trick of making copies of themselves that, in turn, made more copies. The replicating chains were caught in oily bubbles, which protected them and made replication easier; eventually, they began to venture out into the open sea. A new level of order had been achieved on Earth. Life had begun.

The tree of life grew, its branches stretching toward complexity. Organisms developed systems, subsystems, and sub-subsystems, layered in ever-deepening regression. They used these systems to anticipate their future and to change it. When they looked within, some found that they had *selves*—constellations of memories, ideas, and purposes that emerged from the systems inside. They experienced being alive and had thoughts about that experience. They developed language and used it to know themselves; they began to ask how they had been made.

This, to a first approximation, is the secular story of our creation. It has no single author; it's been written collaboratively by scientists over the past few centuries. If, however, it could be said to belong to any single person, that person might be Daniel Dennett, a seventy-four-year-old philosopher who teaches at Tufts. In the course of forty years, and more than a dozen books, Dennett has endeavored to explain how a soulless world could have given rise to a soulful one. His special focus is the creation of the human mind. Into his own he has crammed nearly every related discipline: evolutionary biology, neuroscience, psychology, linguistics,

artificial intelligence. His newest book, "From Bacteria to Bach and Back," tells us, "There is a winding path leading through a jungle of science and philosophy, from the initial bland assumption that we people are physical objects, obeying the laws of physics, to an understanding of our conscious minds."

Dennett has walked that path before. In "Consciousness Explained," a 1991 best-seller, he described consciousness as something like the product of multiple, layered computer programs running on the hardware of the brain. Many readers felt that he had shown how the brain creates the soul. Others thought that he'd missed the point entirely. To them, the book was like a treatise on music that focussed exclusively on the physics of musical instruments. It left untouched the question of how a three-pound lump of neurons could come to possess a point of view, interiority, selfhood, consciousness—qualities that the rest of the material world lacks. These skeptics derided the book as "Consciousness Explained Away." Nowadays, philosophers are divided into two camps. The physicalists believe, with Dennett, that science can explain consciousness in purely material terms. The dualists believe that science can uncover only half of the picture: it can't explain what Nabokov called "the marvel of consciousness—that sudden window swinging open on a sunlit landscape amidst the night of non-being."

Late last year, Dennett found himself among such skeptics at the Edgewater Hotel, in Seattle, where the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research had convened a meeting about animal consciousness. The Edgewater was once a rock-and-roll hangout—in the late sixties and seventies, members of Led Zeppelin were notorious for their

Daniel Dennett's naturalistic account of consciousness draws some people in and puts others off. "There ain't no magic here," he says. "Just stage magic."





PHOTOGRAPH BY IRINA ROZOVSKY

escapades there—but it's now plush and sedate, with overstuffed armchairs and roaring fireplaces. In a fourth-floor meeting room with views of Mt. Rainier, dozens of researchers shared speculative work on honeybee brains, mouse minds, octopus intelligence, avian cognition, and the mental faculties of monkeys and human children.

At sunset on the last day of the conference, the experts found themselves circling a familiar puzzle known as the “zombie problem.” Suppose that you're a scientist studying octopuses. How would you know whether an octopus is conscious? It interacts with you, responds to its environment, and evidently pursues goals, but a nonconscious robot could also do those things. The problem is that there's no way to observe consciousness directly. From the outside, it's possible to imagine that the octopus is a “zombie”—physically alive but mentally empty—and, in theory, the same could be true of any apparently conscious being. The zombie problem is a conversational vortex among those who study animal minds: the researchers, anticipating the discussion's inexorable transformation

into a meditation on “Westworld,” clutched their heads and sighed.

Dennett sat at the seminar table like a king on his throne. Broad-shouldered and imposing, with a fluffy white beard and a round belly, he resembles a cross between Darwin and Santa Claus. He has meaty hands and a sonorous voice. Many young philosophers of mind look like artists (skinny jeans, T-shirts, asymmetrical hair), but Dennett carries a homemade wooden walking stick and dresses like a Maine fisherman, in beat-up boat shoes and a pocketed vest—a costume that gives him an air of unpretentious competence. He regards the zombie problem as a typically philosophical waste of time. The problem presupposes that consciousness is like a light switch: either an animal has a self or it doesn't. But Dennett thinks these things are like evolution, essentially gradualist, without hard borders. The obvious answer to the question of whether animals have selves is that they sort of have them. He loves the phrase “sort of.” Picture the brain, he often says, as a collection of subsystems that “sort of” know, think, decide, and feel. These layers build up, incrementally,

to the real thing. Animals have fewer mental layers than people—in particular, they lack language, which Dennett believes endows human mental life with its complexity and texture—but this doesn't make them zombies. It just means that they “sort of” have consciousness, as measured by human standards.

Dennett waited until the group talked itself into a muddle, then broke in. He speaks slowly, melodiously, in the confident tones of a man with answers. When he uses philosophical lingo, his voice goes deeper, as if he were distancing himself from it. “The big mistake we're making,” he said, “is taking our congenial, shared understanding of what it's like to be us, which we learn from novels and plays and talking to each other, and then applying it back down the animal kingdom. *Wittgenstein*”—he deepened his voice—“famously wrote, ‘If a lion could talk, we couldn't understand him.’ But no! If a lion could talk, we'd understand him just fine. He just wouldn't help us understand anything about lions.”

“Because he wouldn't be a lion,” another researcher said.

“Right,” Dennett replied. “He would be so different from regular lions that he wouldn't tell us what it's like to be a lion. I think we should just get used to the fact that the human concepts we apply so comfortably in our everyday lives apply only sort of to animals.” He concluded, “The notorious *zombie problem* is just a philosopher's fantasy. It's not anything that we have to take seriously.”

“Dan, I honestly get stuck on this,” a primate psychologist said. “If you say, well, rocks don't have consciousness, I want to agree with you”—but he found it difficult to get an imaginative grip on the idea of a monkey with a “sort of” mind.

If philosophy were a sport, its ball would be human intuition. Philosophers compete to shift our intuitions from one end of the field to the other. Some intuitions, however, resist being shifted. Among these is our conviction that there are only two states of being: awake or asleep, conscious or unconscious, alive or dead, soulful or material. Dennett believes that there is a spectrum, and that we can train ourselves to find the idea of that spectrum intuitive.

“If you think there's a fixed meaning of the word ‘consciousness,’ and we're

OUR BELOVED JOB CREATOR



searching for that, then you're already making a mistake," Dennett said.

"I hear you as skeptical about whether consciousness is useful as a scientific concept," another researcher ventured.

"Yes, yes," Dennett said.

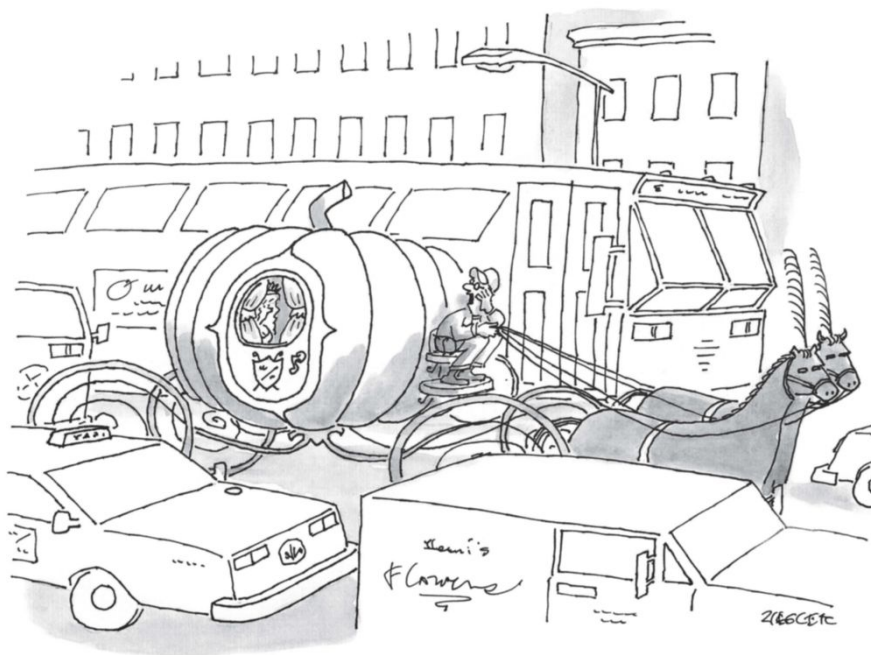
"That's the ur-question," the researcher replied. "Because, if the answer's no, then we should really go home!"

"No, no!" Dennett exclaimed, as the room erupted into laughter. He'd done it again: in attempting to explain consciousness, he'd explained it away.

In the nineteenth century, scientists and philosophers couldn't figure out how nonliving things became living. They thought that living things possessed a mysterious life force. Only over time did they discover that life was the product of diverse physical systems that, together, created something that appeared magical. Dennett believes that the same story will be told about consciousness. He wants to tell it, but he sometimes wonders if others want to hear it.

"The person who tells people how an effect is achieved is often resented, considered a spoilsport, a party-pooper," he wrote, around a decade ago, in a paper called "Explaining the 'Magic' of Consciousness." "If you actually manage to explain consciousness, they say, you will diminish us all, turn us into mere protein robots, mere things." Dennett does not believe that we are "mere things." He thinks that we have souls, but he is certain that those souls can be explained by science. If evolution built them, they can be reverse-engineered. "There ain't no magic there," he told me. "Just stage magic."

IT'S POSSIBLE TO give an account of Dennett's life in which philosophy hardly figures. He is from an old Maine family. By the turn of the eighteenth century, ancestors of his had settled near the border between Maine and New Hampshire, at a spot now marked by Dennett Road. Dennett and his wife, Susan, live in North Andover, Massachusetts, a few minutes' drive from Tufts, where Dennett co-directs the Center for Cognitive Studies. But, in 1970, they bought a two-hundred-acre farm in Blue Hill, about five hours north of Boston. The Dennetts are unusually easygoing and sociable, and they quickly became friends with the couple next door, Basil



"Seriously, lady, at this hour you'd make a lot better time taking the subway."

and Bertha Turner. From Basil, Dennett learned to frame a house, shingle a roof, glaze a window, build a fence, plow a field, fell a tree, butcher a hen, dig for clams, raise pigs, fish for trout, and call a square dance. "One thing about Dan—you don't have to tell him twice," Turner once remarked to a local mechanic. Dennett still cherishes the compliment.

In the course of a few summers, he fixed up the Blue Hill farmhouse himself, installing plumbing and electricity. Then, for many years, he suspended his academic work during the summer in order to devote himself to farming. He tended the orchard, made cider, and used a Prohibition-era still to turn the cider into Calvados. He built a blueberry press, made blueberry wine, and turned it into aquavit. "He loves to hand down word-of-mouth knowledge," Steve Barney, a former student who has become one of the Dennetts' many "honorary children," says. "He taught me how to use a chain saw, how to prune an apple tree, how to fish for mackerel, how to operate a tractor, how to whittle a wooden walking stick from a single piece of wood." Dennett is an avid sailor; in 2003, he bought a boat, trained his students to sail, and raced with them in a regatta. Dennett's son, Peter, has

worked for a tree surgeon and a fish biologist, and has been a white-water-rafting guide; his daughter, Andrea, runs an industrial-plumbing company with her husband.

A few years ago, the Dennetts sold the farm to buy a nearby waterfront home, on Little Deer Isle. On a sunny morning this past December, fresh snow surrounded the house; where the lawn met the water, a Hobie sailboat lay awaiting spring. Dennett entered the sunlit kitchen and, using a special, broad-tined fork, carefully split an English muffin. After eating it with jam, he entered his study, a circular room on the ground floor decorated with sailboat keels of different shapes. A close friend and Little Deer Isle visitor, the philosopher and psychologist Nicholas Humphrey, had e-mailed a draft of an article for Dennett to review. The two men are similar—Humphrey helped discover blindsight, studied apes with Dian Fossey, and was, for a year, the editor of *Granta*—but they differ on certain points in the philosophy of consciousness. "Until I met Dan," Humphrey told me, "I never had a philosophical hero. Then I discovered that not only was he a better philosopher than me; he was a better singer, a better dancer, a better tennis

player, a better pianist. There is nothing he does not do."

Dennett annotated the paper on his computer, and then called Humphrey on his cell phone to explain that the paper was so useful because it was so *wrong*. "I see how I can write a reaction that is not so much a rebuttal as a rebuilding on your foundations," he said, mischievously. "Your exploration has helped me see some crucial joints in the skeleton. I hope that doesn't upset you!" He laughed, and invited Humphrey and his family to come over later that day.

He then turned to a problem with the house. Something was wrong with the landline; it had no dial tone. The key question was whether the problem lay with the wiring inside the house or with the telephone lines outside. Picking up his walking stick and a small plastic telephone, he went out to explore. Dennett has suffered a heart attack and an aortic dissection; he is robust, but walks slowly and is sometimes short of breath. Carefully, he made his way to a little gray service box, pried it open using a multitool, and plugged in the handset. There was no dial tone; the problem was in the outside phone lines. Harrumphing, he glanced upward to locate them: another new joint in the skeleton.

During the course of his career, Dennett has developed a way of looking at the process by which raw matter becomes functional. Some objects are mere assemblages of atoms to us, and have only a physical dimension; when we think of them, he says, we adopt a "physicalist stance"—the stance we inhabit when, using equations, we predict the direction of a tropical storm. When it comes to more sophisticated objects, which have purposes and functions, we typically adopt a "design stance." We say that a leaf's "purpose" is to capture energy from sunlight, and that a nut and bolt are designed to fit together. Finally, there are objects that seem to have beliefs and desires, toward which we take the "intentional stance." If you're playing chess with a chess computer, you don't scrutinize the conductive properties of its circuits or contemplate the inner workings of its operating system

(the physicalist and design stances, respectively); you ask how the program is thinking, what it's planning, what it "wants" to do. These different stances capture different levels of reality, and our language reveals which one we've adopted. We say that proteins fold (the physicalist stance), but that eyes see (the design stance). We say that the chess computer "anticipated" our move, that the driverless car "decided" to swerve when the deer leaped into the road.

Later, at a rickety antique table in the living room, Dennett taught me a word game he'd perfected called Frigatebird. Real frigate birds swoop down to steal fish from other birds; in Frigatebird, you steal words made of Scrabble tiles

from your opponents. To do so, you use new letters to transform their stems: you can't steal "march" by making "marched," but you can do it by making "charmed." As we played, I tried to attend to the workings of my own mind. How did I know that I could use the letters "u," "t," and "o" to transform Dennett's "drain" into "duration"? I couldn't quite catch myself in the act of figuring it out. To Dennett, this blindness reflects the fact that we take the intentional stance toward ourselves. We experience ourselves at the level of thoughts, decisions, and intentions; the machinery that generates those higher-order properties is obscured. Consciousness is defined as much by what it hides as by what it reveals. Over two evenings, while drinking gin on the rocks with a twist—a "sort of" cocktail—we played perhaps a dozen games of Frigatebird, and I lost every time. Dennett was patient and encouraging ("You're getting the hang of it!"), even as he transformed my "quest" into "equations."

A RUNNING JOKE AMONG people who study consciousness is that Dennett himself might be a zombie. ("Only a zombie like Dennett could write a book called 'Consciousness Explained' that doesn't address consciousness at all," the computer scientist Jaron Lanier has written.) The implicit criticism is that Dennett's account of consciousness treats the self like a computer and reflects a disengagement from things like feel-

ing and beauty. Dennett seems wounded by this idea. "There are those wags who insist that I was born with an impoverished mental life," he told me. "That ain't me! I seem to be drinking in life's joys pretty well."

Dennett's full name is Daniel Clement Dennett III. He was born in Boston in 1942. His father, Daniel C. Dennett, Jr., was a professor of Islamic history, who, during the Second World War, was recruited by the Office of Strategic Services and became a secret agent. Dennett spent his early childhood in Beirut, where his father posed as a cultural attaché at the American Embassy. In Beirut, he had a pet gazelle named Babar and learned to speak some Arabic. When he was five, his father was killed in an unexplained plane crash while on a mission in Ethiopia. In Dennett's clearest memory of him, they're driving through the desert in a Jeep, looking for a group of Bedouins; when they find the camp, some Bedouin women take the young Dennett aside and pierce his ears. (The scars are still visible.)

After his father's death, Dennett returned to the Boston suburbs with his mother and his two sisters. His mother became a book editor; with some guidance from his father's friends, Dennett became the man of the house. He had his own workshop and, aged six, used scraps of lumber to build a small table and chair for his Winnie-the-Pooh. As he fell asleep, he would listen to his mother play Rachmaninoff's Piano Prelude No. 6 in E-Flat Major. Today, the piece moves him to tears—"I've tried to master it," he says, "but I could never play it as well as she could." For a while, Dennett made money playing jazz piano in bars. He also plays the guitar, the acoustic bass, the recorder, and the accordion, and can still sing the a-cappella tunes he learned, in his twenties, as a member of the Boston Saengerfest Men's Chorus.

As a Harvard undergraduate, Dennett wanted to be an artist. He pursued painting, then switched to sculpture; when he met Susan, he told her that she had nice shoulders and asked if she would model for him. (She declined, but they were married two years later.) A photograph taken in 1963, when Dennett was a graduate student, shows



him trim and shirtless in a courtyard in Athens, smoking a pipe as he works a block of marble. Although he succeeded in exhibiting some sculptures in galleries, he decided that he wasn't brilliant enough to make a career in art. Still, he continued to sculpt, throw pots, build furniture, and whittle. His whittlings are finely detailed; most are meant to be handled. A life-size wooden apple comes apart, in cross-sections, to reveal a detailed stem and core; a fist-size nut and bolt turn smoothly on minute, perfectly made threads. (Billed as "haptic sculptures," the whittles are currently on display at Underdonk, a gallery in Brooklyn.)

Dennett studied philosophy as an undergraduate with W. V. O. Quine, the Harvard logician. His scientific awakening came later, when he was a graduate student at Oxford. With a few classmates, he found himself debating what happens when your arm falls asleep. The others were discussing the problem in abstract, philosophical terms—"sensation," "perception," and the like—which struck Dennett as odd. Two decades earlier, the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, Dennett's dissertation adviser, had coined the phrase "the ghost in the machine" to mock the theory, associated with René Descartes, that our physical bodies are controlled by immaterial souls. The other students were talking about the ghost; Dennett wanted to study the machine. He began teaching himself neuroscience the next day. Later, with the help of various ac-

ademic friends and neighbors, Dennett learned about psychology, computer programming, linguistics, and artificial intelligence—the disciplines that came to form cognitive science.

One of Dennett's early collaborators was Douglas Hofstadter, the polymath genius whose book about the mind, "Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid," became an unlikely best-seller in 1979. "When he was young, he played the philosophy game very strictly," Hofstadter said of Dennett. "He studied the analytic philosophers and the Continental philosophers and wrote pieces that responded to them in the traditional way. But then he started deviating from the standard pathway. He became much more informed by science than many of his colleagues, and he grew very frustrated with the constant, prevalent belief among them in such things as zombies. These things started to annoy him, and he started writing piece after piece to try to destroy the myths that he considered these to be—the religious residues of dualism."

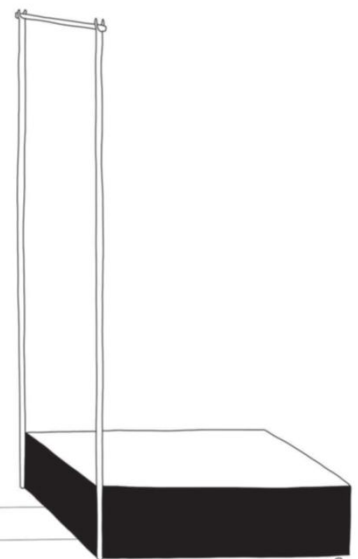
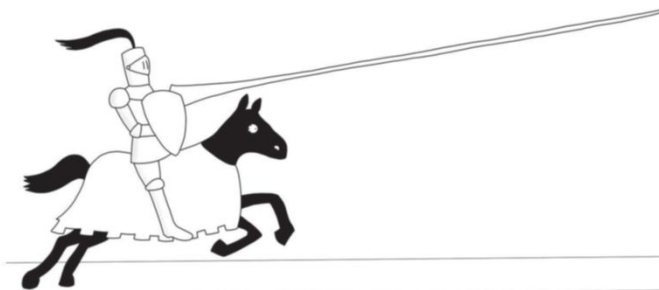
Arguments, Dennett found, rarely shift intuitions; it's through stories that we revise our sense of what's natural. (He calls such stories "intuition pumps.") In 1978, he published a short story called "Where Am I?," in which a philosopher, also named Daniel Dennett, is asked to volunteer for a dangerous mission to disarm an experimental nuclear warhead. The warhead, which is buried beneath Tulsa, Okla-

homa, emits a kind of radiation that's safe for the body but lethal to the brain. Government scientists decide on a radical plan: they separate Dennett's brain from his body, using radio transmitters implanted in his skull to allow the brain, which is stored in a vat in Houston, to control the body as it approaches the warhead. "Think of it as a mere stretching of the nerves," the scientists say. "If your brain were just moved over an inch in your skull, that would not alter or impair your mind. We're simply going to make the nerves indefinitely elastic by splicing radio links into them."

After the surgery, Dennett is led into the brain-support lab:

I peered through the glass. There, floating in what looked like ginger ale, was undeniably a human brain, though it was almost covered with printed circuit chips, plastic tubules, electrodes, and other paraphernalia. . . . I thought to myself: "Well, here I am sitting on a folding chair, staring through a piece of plate glass at my own brain. . . . But wait," I said to myself, "shouldn't I have thought, 'Here I am, suspended in a bubbling fluid, being stared at by my own eyes?'" . . . I tried and tried to think myself into the vat, but to no avail.

Toward the end of the story, the radio equipment malfunctions, and Dennett's point of view is instantly relocated. It is "an impressive demonstration of the immateriality of the soul, based on physicalist principles and premises," he writes, "for as the last radio signal between Tulsa and Houston died away, had I not changed location from Tulsa to Houston at the



speed of light?" The story contains only neurons and machines, and is entirely materialist; even so, it shows that you aren't situated "in" your brain the same way you're situated "in" a room. It also suggests that the intuitions upon which philosophers so confidently rely are actually illusions created by an elaborate system of machinery.

Only rarely do cracks in the illusion of consciousness appear through which one might see the machinery at work. Proust inspected the state between sleep and wakefulness. Coleridge experimented with mind-altering drugs. Neuroscientists examine minds compromised by brain injury. Dennett's approach has been to look back into evolutionary history. In the minds of other animals, even insects, Dennett believes, we can see the functional components upon which our selfhood depends. We can also see the qualities we value most in human selfhood in "sort of" form. Even free will, he thinks, evolves over evolutionary time. Your amygdala, the part of the brain that registers fear, may not be free in any meaningful sense—it's effectively a robot—but it endows the mind to which it belongs with the ability to avoid danger. In this way, the

winding path leads from determinism to freedom, too: "A whole can be *freer* than its parts."

A LONG WITH Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens, Dennett is often cited as one of the "four horsemen of the New Atheism." In a 2006 book called "Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon," he argued that religion ought to be studied rather than practiced. Recently, with the researcher Linda LaScola, he published "Caught in the Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind," a book of interviews with clergy people who have lost their faith. He can be haughty in his dismissal of religion. A few years ago, while he was recovering from his aortic dissection, he wrote an essay called "Thank Goodness," in which he chastised well-wishers for saying "Thank God." (He urged them, instead, to thank "goodness," as embodied by the doctors, nurses, and scientists who were "genuinely responsible for the fact that I am alive.")

Yet Dennett is also comfortable with religion—even, in some ways, nostalgic for it. Like his wife, he was brought up as a Congregationalist, and although

he never believed in God, he enjoyed going to church. For much of his life, Dennett has sung sacred music in choirs (he gets misty-eyed when he recalls singing Bach's "St. Matthew Passion"). He and Susan tried sending their children to Sunday school, so that they could enjoy the music, sermons, and Bible stories, but it didn't take. Dennett's sister Cynthia is a minister: "A saintly person," Dennett says, admiringly, "who's a little annoyed by her little brother."

The materialist world view is often associated with despair. In "Anna Karenina," Konstantin Levin, the novel's hero, stares into the night sky, reflects upon his brief, bubblelike existence in an infinite and indifferent universe, and contemplates suicide. For Dennett, however, materialism is spiritually satisfying. In a 1995 book called "Darwin's Dangerous Idea," he asks, "How long did it take Johann Sebastian Bach to create the 'St. Matthew Passion'?" Bach, he notes, had to live for forty-two years before he could begin writing it, and he drew on two thousand years of Christianity—indeed, on all of human culture. The subsystems of his mind had been evolving for even longer; creating *Homo sapiens*, Dennett writes, required "billions of years of *irreplaceable* design work"—performed not by God, of course, but by natural selection.

"Darwin's dangerous idea," Dennett writes, is that Bach's music, Christianity, human culture, the human mind, and *Homo sapiens* "all exist as fruits of a single tree, the Tree of Life," which "created itself, not in a miraculous, instantaneous whoosh, but slowly, slowly." He asks, "Is this Tree of Life a God one could worship? Pray to? Fear? Probably not." But, he says, it is "greater than anything any of us will ever conceive of in detail worthy of its detail. . . . I could not pray to it, but I can stand in affirmation of its magnificence. This world is sacred."

Almost every December for the past forty years, the Dennetts have held a black-tie Christmas-carolling party at their home. This year, snow was falling as the guests arrived; the airy modern shingle-style house was decorated like a Yuletide bed-and-breakfast, with toy soldiers on parade. In the kitchen,



"I'll go shop around for a doctor."

a small robotic dog-on-wheels named Tati huddled nonfunctionally; the living-room bookshelf displayed a set of Dennett-made Russian dolls—Descartes on the outside, a ghost in the middle, and a robot inside the ghost.

Dennett, dapper in his tuxedo, mingled with the guests. With a bearded, ponytailed postdoc, he considered some mysteries of monkey consciousness; with his silver-haired neighbors, many of whom had attended the party annually since 1976, he discussed the Patriots and the finer points of apple brandy. After a potluck dinner, he called everyone over to the piano, where Mark DeVoto, a retired music professor, was noodling on “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” From piles on a Dennett-built coffee table, Dennett and his wife distributed homemade books of Christmas carols.

“Hello!” Dennett said. “Are we ready?” Surrounded by friends, he was grinning from ear to ear. “Let’s go. We’ll start with ‘O Come, All Ye Faithful.’ First verse in English, second in Latin!”

Earlier, I’d asked Susan Dennett how their atheism would shape their carol-singing. “When we get to the parts about the Virgin, we sometimes sing with our eyebrows raised,” she said. In the event, their performance was unironic. Dennett, a brave soloist, sang beautifully, then apologized for his voice. The most arresting carol was a tune called “O Harken Ye.” Dennett sang the words “*Gloria, gloria / In excelsis Deo*” with great seriousness, his hands at his sides, his eyes faraway. When the carol faded into an appreciative silence, he sighed and said, “Now, that’s a beautiful hymn.”

DENNETT HAS A philosophical arch-nemesis: an Australian named David Chalmers. Chalmers, who teaches at N.Y.U. and at the Australian National University, believes that Dennett only “sort of” understands consciousness. In his view, Dennett’s theories don’t adequately explain subjective experience or why there is an inner life in the first place.

Chalmers and Dennett are as different as two philosophers of mind can be. Chalmers wears a black leather jacket over a black T-shirt. He believes in the zombie problem and is the lead singer of a consciousness-themed rock band



“You’d think a celebrity sex tape would display a higher degree of showmanship.”

that performs a song called “The Zombie Blues.” (“I act like you act, I do what you do. . . / What consciousness is, I ain’t got a clue / I got the Zombie Blues.”) In his most important book, “The Conscious Mind,” published in 1996, Chalmers accused Dennett and the physicalists of focussing on the “easy problems” of consciousness—questions about the workings of neurons or other cognitive systems—while ignoring the “hard problem.” In a formulation he likes: “How does the water of the brain turn into the wine of consciousness?” Since then, the “hard problem” has been a rallying cry for those philosophers who think that Dennett’s view of the mind is incomplete.

Consider your laptop. It’s processing information but isn’t having experiences. Now, suppose that every year your laptop gets smarter. A few years from now, it may, like I.B.M.’s Watson, win “Jeopardy!” Soon afterward, it may

have meaningful conversations with you, like the smartphone voiced by Scarlett Johansson in “Her.” Johansson’s character is conscious: you can fall in love with her, and she with you. There’s a soul in that phone. But how did it get there? How was the inner space of consciousness opened up within the circuits and code? This is the hard problem. Dennett regards it, too, as a philosopher’s fantasy. Chalmers thinks that, at present, it is insurmountable. If it’s easy for you to imagine a conscious robot, then you probably side with Dennett. If it’s easier to imagine a robot that only *seems* conscious, you’re probably with Chalmers.

A few years ago, a Russian venture capitalist named Dmitry Volkov organized a showdown between Dennett and Chalmers near Disko Island, off the west coast of Greenland. Before making a fortune investing in Shazam and in the Russian version of PayPal, Volkov



"Could we move the piece representing ourselves a little farther away from the battle?"

was a graduate student in philosophy at Moscow State University, where he wrote a dissertation on Dennett's work. Now he chartered a hundred-and-sixty-eight-foot schooner, the S/V Rembrandt van Rijn, and invited Dennett, Chalmers, and eighteen other philosophers on a weeklong cruise, along with ten graduate students. Most of the professional philosophers were materialists, like Dennett, but the graduate students were uncommitted. Dennett and Chalmers would compete for their allegiance.

In June, when the Arctic sun never sets, the lowlands of Disko are covered with flowering angelica. The philosophers piled into inflatable boats to explore the fjords and the tundra. The year before, in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Dennett had published a paper called "The Mystery of David Chalmers," in which he proposed seven reasons for Chalmers's resistance to his views, among them a fear of death and a pointless desire to "pursue exhaustively

nuanced analyses of our intuitions." This had annoyed Chalmers, but on the cruise the two philosophers were still able to marvel, companionably, at the landscape's alien beauty. Later, everyone gathered in the Rembrandt's spacious galley, where Volkov, a slim, voluble man in sailor's stripes, presided over an intellectual round-robin. Each philosopher gave a talk summarizing another's work; afterward, the philosopher who had been summarized responded and took questions.

Andy Clark, a lean Scottish philosopher with a punk shock of pink hair, summarized Dennett's views. He wore a T-shirt depicting a peacock with a tail made of screwdrivers, wrenches, and other tools. "It obviously looks like something quite colorful and full of complexity and 'peacockness,'" he said. "But, if you look more closely, that complexity is actually built out of a number of little devices."

"A Swiss Army peacock!" Dennett rumbled, approvingly. He was in his

element: he loves parties, materialism, and the sea.

After the introduction and summarizing part was over, Chalmers, carrying a can of Palm Belgian ale, walked to the front of the room and began his remarks. Neurobiological explanations of consciousness focus on brain functions, he said. But, "when it comes to explaining consciousness, one needs to explain more than the functions. There are *introspective* data—data about what it's like to be a conscious subject, what it's like experiencing *now* and hearing *now*, what it's like to have an emotion or to hear music." He continued, "There are some people, like Dan Dennett, who think that all we need to explain is the functions. . . . Many people find that this is not taking consciousness seriously." Lately, he said, he had been gravitating toward "pan-protopsyism"—the idea that consciousness might be "a fundamental property of the universe" upon which the brain somehow draws. It was a strange idea, but, then, consciousness *was* strange.

Andy Clark was the first to respond. "You didn't actually give us any positives for pan-psyism," he said. "It was kind of the counsel of despair."

Jesse Prinz, a blue-haired philosopher from CUNY, seemed almost enraged. "Positing dualism leads to no further insights and discoveries!" he said.

Calmly, nursing his beer, Chalmers responded to his critics. He said that he *could* make a positive case for pan-protopsyism, pointed out that his position wasn't necessarily antimaterialist (a pan-psyic force could be perfectly material, like electromagnetism), and declared that he was all in favor of more neuroscientific research.

Dennett had lurked off to the side, stolid and silent, but he now launched into an argument about perspective. He told Chalmers that there didn't have to be a hard boundary between third-person explanations and first-person experience—between, as it were, the description of the sugar molecule and the taste of sweetness. Why couldn't one see oneself as taking two different stances toward a single phenomenon? It was possible, he said, to be "neutral about the metaphysical status of the data." From the outside, it looks like neurons; from the inside, it feels like consciousness. Problem solved.

Chalmers was unconvinced. Pacing up and down the galley, he insisted that “merely cataloguing the third-person data” could not explain the existence of a first-person point of view.

Dennett sighed and, leaning against the wall, weighed his words. “I don’t see why it isn’t an embarrassment to your view,” he said, “that you can’t name a kind of experiment that would get at ‘first-personal data,’ or ‘experiences.’ That’s all I ask—give me a single example of a scientifically respectable experiment!”

“There are any number of experiments!” Chalmers said, heatedly. When the argument devolved into a debate about different kinds of experimental setups, Dennett said, “I think maybe this session is over, don’t you? It’s time to go to the bar!” He looked to Chalmers, who smiled.

Among the professional philosophers, Dennett seemed to have won a narrow victory. But a survey conducted at the end of the cruise found that most of the grad students had joined Team Chalmers. Volkov conjectured that for many people, especially those who are new to philosophy, “it’s the question of the soul that’s driving their opinions. It’s the value of human life. It’s the question of the special position of humans in the world, in the universe.”

Despite his affability, Dennett sometimes expresses a weary frustration with the immovable intuitions of the people he is trying to convince. “You shouldn’t trust your intuitions,” he told the philosophers on the Rembrandt. “Conceivability or inconceivability is a life’s work—it’s not something where you just screw up your head for a second!” He feels that Darwin’s central lesson—that everything in biology is gradual; that it arrives “not in a miraculous, instantaneous whoosh, but slowly, slowly”—is too easily swept aside by our categorical habits of mind. It could be that he is struggling with the nature of language, which imposes a hierarchical clarity upon the world that’s powerful but sometimes false. It could also be that he is wrong. For him, the struggle—a Darwinian struggle, at the level of ideas—continues. “I have devoted half a century, my entire academic life, to the project, in a dozen books and hundreds of articles tackling various pieces of the puzzle,

without managing to move all that many readers from wary agnosticism to calm conviction,” he writes, in “From Bacteria to Bach and Back.” “Undaunted, I am trying once again.”

FOR MANY YEARS, I took Chalmers’s side in this dispute. I read Dennett’s “Consciousness Explained,” but I felt that something crucial was missing. I couldn’t understand how neurons—even billions of neurons—could generate the experience of being *me*. Terrence Deacon, an anthropologist who writes about consciousness and neuroscience, refers to “the Cartesian wound that separated mind from body at the birth of modern science.” For a long time, not even the profoundly informed arguments that Dennett advanced proved capable of healing that wound.

Then, late last year, my mother had a catastrophic stroke. It devastated the left side of her brain, wrecking her parietal and temporal lobes and Broca’s area—parts of the brain that are involved in the emotions, the senses, memory, and speech. My mother now appears to be living in an eternal present. She can say only two words, “water” and “time.” She is present in the room—she looks me in the eye—but is capable of only fleeting recognition; she knows only that I am someone she should recognize. She grasps the world, but lightly.

As I spent time with my mother, I found that my intuitions were shifting to Dennett’s side of the field. It seems natural to say that she “sort of” thinks, knows, cares, remembers, and understands, and that she is “sort of” conscious. It seems obvious that there is no “light switch” for consciousness: she is present and absent in different ways, depending on which of her subsystems are functioning. I still can’t quite picture how neurons create consciousness. But, perhaps because I can take a stance toward my mother that I can’t take toward myself, my belief in the “hard problem” has dissolved. On an almost visceral level, I find it easier to accept the reality of the material mind. I have moved from agnosticism to calm conviction.

On a morning this past winter, Den-

nett sat in an armchair in his Maine living room. The sky and the water were blue and bright. He’d acquired two copies of the Ellsworth *American*, the local newspaper; later, he and Susan would sit by the fireplace and compete to see who could finish the crossword first. In the meantime, he was thinking about the nature of understanding. He recalled a time, many years ago, when he found himself lecturing a group of physicists. He showed them a slide that read “ $E=mc^2$ ” and asked if anyone in the audience understood it. Almost all of the physicists raised their hands, but one man sitting in the front protested. “Most of the people in this room are experimentalists,” he said. “They think they understand this equation, but, really, they don’t. The only people who really understand it are the theoreticians.”

“Understanding, too, comes in degrees,” Dennett concluded, back in his Maine living room. “So how do you take that last step? What if the answer is: ‘Well, you can only sort of take it?’” Physics, Dennett said, tells us that there are more than three dimensions, and we can use math to prove they’re there; at the same time, we struggle to picture them in our heads. That doesn’t mean they’re not real. Perhaps, he thought, the wholly material soul is similarly hard to imagine. “I’m not ready to say it’s unimaginable, because there are times when

I think I can imagine it,” he said, “and then it doesn’t seem to be such a big leap at all. But—it is.”

Before the morning slipped away, Dennett decided to go out for a walk, down to where the lawn ended and a rocky beach began. He’d long deliriously highlighted in a particular

rock formation, where a few stones were piled just so, creating a peephole. He was disappointed to find that the tides had rearranged the stones, and that the hole had disappeared. The dock was pulled ashore for the winter, its parts stacked next to his sailboat. He walked down the steps anyway, occasionally leaning on his walking stick. For a few minutes, he stood at the bottom, savoring the frigid air, the lapping water, the dazzling sun. ♦



HERMAN MELVILLE,
VOLUME I

—
VICTOR LODATO



SHE'S CARRYING TWO skateboards, two backpacks, the banjo in its scratched-up case—a husk of molded leather that's always looked to her like a giant key but now seems more like a coffin.

Maybe because she hasn't played in weeks. This time of year, people don't stop; the coins in their pockets stay there.

Are you too good for fifty cents? Evan had scolded her. If Evan had his way, she'd be playing every day. He doesn't understand how much it takes to stand in front of strangers and summon up songs she learned as a child. Especially on dark afternoons, with the mist spitting in her face like some pissed-off ghost. She refuses to play under such conditions.

Anyway, she wants to protect the instrument—the pretty cherry wood, the feathery carving on the neck. It's the only fine thing she has; why ruin it? Her father had said never get it wet. Treat it wrong and it would get sick, same as anything.

So she'd let it sleep for a bit. The case was comfy, lined with velvet.

Again, the coffin comes to mind. She grunts and shifts her load, trying not to fall.

Maybe Evan had wandered into town. Often he didn't sleep well, and sometimes, when he got up, he needed to burn off some dream he'd had. Usually he was back within an hour. Today she'd waited almost until noon, when a woman who lived across the street from the empty lot came over to inform her that the land was private property. The woman had stared (cell phone threateningly in hand) until the girl packed up all the gear and went limping down the street.

EVAN'S PACK IS way too heavy. What feels like bricks, she knows, are books. One of them, a hardcover, is biting into her shoulder.

Are you going to read them? she'd asked him. He said yes, he'd definitely read them—but later, when they were settled, when it was warmer. Maybe in April, he said.

There's a diet book, a book about car repair, a biography of the guy who wrote "Moby-Dick." The biography is nearly a thousand pages long, even though it's only Volume I—just the first thirty years of Melville's life. She assumes it's pre-

"Moby-Dick," because who writes something like "Moby-Dick" before they're thirty. Evan was already twenty-three, and she's used up only a few years less. It was unlikely that either of them would accomplish much, at this rate. She's never even read "Moby-Dick," though of course she knows it's about a whale. *Man against nature*. She recalls the phrase from school.

When it comes to books, Evan takes whatever he can find—freebies on the curb, or sour wrecks from garbage bins. It drives her crazy, the way he doesn't discriminate. He'll pick up *anything*. The diet book, for instance—that was just ridiculous. She and Evan were about as fat as Popsicle sticks. On cold nights, when they slept in the same bag, they fit no problem, and when they jammed against each other for comfort their hips clacked like castanets.

"But look, babe," he'd said, showing her the pictures—bright veggies on white plates and artful piles of fruit. "Doesn't that look nice?"

Even as she said yes, she felt embarrassed, as if they were looking at pornography.

ON MAIN STREET, men are blowing leaves; the air smells like diesel. She notices that they don't turn off their blowers as she approaches, the way they do for most people. Maybe she has leaves in her hair—it was certainly possible. Her face is probably dirty, too.

She smiles at the men, showing her good teeth, which she hopes will distract them from the rest of her. The younger man smiles back and turns off his blower. The other one follows suit.

She scurries by, unaccosted.

Good teeth, she's learned, are like a passport: they helped you cross borders. Evan has terrible teeth, insanely crooked. Every time he opens his mouth, you can see the unloved child he'd surely been. It always surprised her, the way strangers reacted. What should have elicited sympathy—or even pity—tended to arouse suspicion.

Of course, Evan did have a funny way of speaking—a creaky hesitation, as if he couldn't get the words out, and then, when he finally did, it was more like a sneeze, or a bark. It seemed aggressive, though he meant no harm. He was just intense, slightly feral. When

he asked for money, people often misunderstood him. She hurries on, hoping he isn't in trouble.

How could it be getting dark already? The weather around here changes so quickly it's like some crazy opera, with floodlights and invisible people pulling levers. *Now sun! Now rain!* A billowing cloud is following her like a blimp.

She tries not to worry—remembering how, a few weeks ago, when they were moving along the coast, they'd spent a night on a deserted beach in Bandon, and in the morning there was a starfish on one of Evan's boots. It seemed a good sign. Evan had walked with it for a bit—two of its golden arms protruding like a spur. Later, when he put his boot in the water to let the starfish go, they'd both said goodbye to it. Evan, adorably, had waved.

IT'S A PRETTY little town—she'll give it that. They'd passed through here before, in the spring. But even now, cast into gloom, the place seems poised for a postcard. Fairy-tale pines and fearless deer. Fresh-painted porches, fluttering prayer flags. There are squirrels cheeky with nuts and autumn roses poking through fences. Some of the houses look like the witch's cottage from "Hansel and Gretel." It wasn't uncommon to see shells or beads hanging in gardens, or Victorian rooftops resembling fancy cookies. On one place there are bits of yellow glass that look like lemon drops.

Maybe Evan had got hungry. She heads toward the café they've been going to for the past few days. There's a guy there who gives them free coffee, though he fills the paper cups only halfway.

Not that she was complaining. It was just funny how, even when people were being nice, they gave you only as much as they thought you deserved. When she played her banjo in the park, it irritated her if someone tossed down pennies.

She could see why Evan thought she was prideful—but that wasn't the right word. Sure, she knew she was good, but she never considered the music hers. All the trancelike drones and the clever fretwork, she'd fashioned after her father. The way he could open a song, make it shimmer or bleed, depending

on how he cut it. To recognize the same competence in herself wasn't pride; it was simply gratitude, or respect.

It was sort of like putting flowers on his grave.

SHE STOPS BY the fountain. With some napkins she's saved, she tries to freshen up a bit. But when she wets the brown paper and rubs it across her face it falls apart. She can feel bits of it sticking to her skin. She wipes down her backpack, too. It's filthy, found in a bin in Portland. There are pink and green polka dots. It probably belonged to a kid once. She doesn't wipe down Evan's pack, because it's black and the dirt doesn't do it any disservice. The dirt actually helps, like shoe polish—hides the scuffs. She pulls back her greasy hair and secures it with a rubber band. Then she opens Evan's pack and puts on his Diamondbacks cap. She brushes her teeth with her tongue and straightens the cuffs of her jeans. She'll brush for real in the bathroom of the coffee shop.

They haven't had proper shelter in weeks. Up North, there are more places, but around here there's only the one,

and Evan doesn't like the vibe of it—the prayers before meals, the sad chapel with folding chairs, the pamphlets.

It doesn't really bother her, that religious stuff—and the people who work in those places usually look you in the eye. Plus, a shower's a shower. She's hoping for one tonight. It's supposed to snow, and they'll have no choice but to go back to the Christians. There's always dessert.

Evan complains that the beds look like something from a hospital. But she knows that what really bothers him is that they can't sleep in the same room. She hates that, too—but it's worth it, because when they get back on the road and he kisses her freshly scrubbed neck she feels hopeful; she feels she has something to give him.

Anyway, between the two of them it's not just about sex. Promises have been made. Promises that are easier to believe when she's clean.

H E'S NOT IN the park. She wonders if he's hiked up to the reservoir, though she'd have trouble getting there with all the gear. When she emerges back onto the plaza, there are several

men with packs. Evan isn't among them.

She'd like to sit on one of the benches and wait—but she knows, if she does, one of the other roamers will approach her and want to chat.

Where you coming from? Where you headed?

Some man will ask her if she wants company.

There are about five of them, loitering by a sculpture of a bear standing on its hind legs—a splotchy bronze. The men's skin is a similar color, strangely candied by sun and weather. Their scarves look like bandages, and two of them have knife sheaths hanging prominently from their belts. One guy has so many tattoos on his face he seems to be peering out from behind a thicket.

In the warmer months, there were more women. There were kids from California roughing it for a week; middle-aged hippies from the music fests; hikers from the Pacific Crest Trail. These days, it's down to something darker—the folks who can't or won't go home. Mostly men—and, with the weather closing in, they seem more tightly wound. Evan should realize that he can't just disappear whenever he's in some crazy mood.

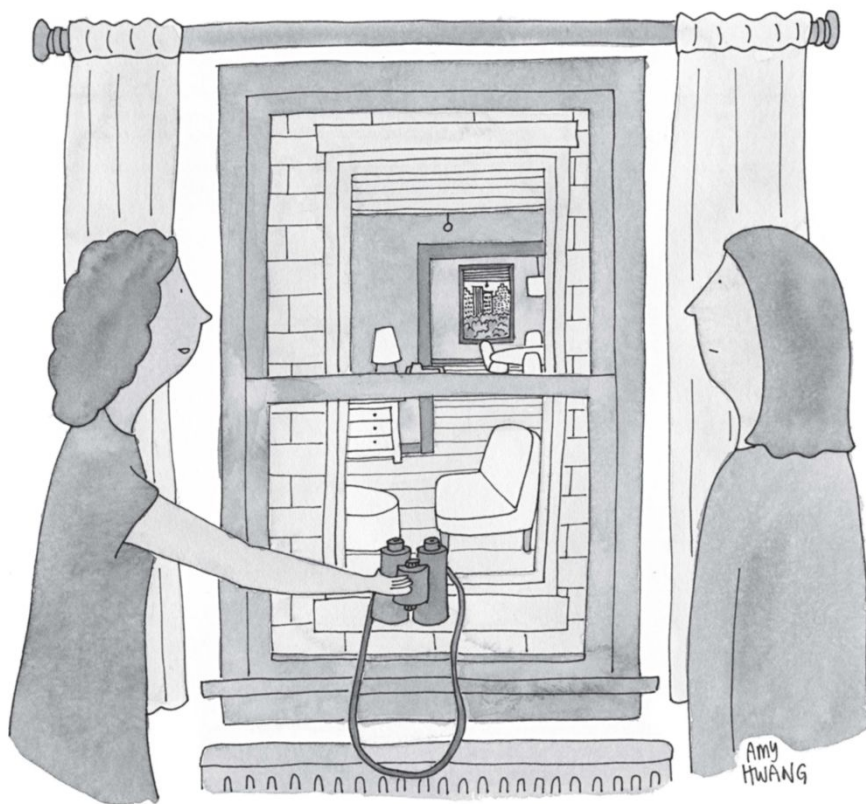
As she walks away, it's hard to tell if the knot in her stomach is anger or fear. She looks up at the gray, potbelly sky and wishes she were back in Tucson. A life that had once meant nothing to her seems epic now: a sun so hot it could make you shiver, her father's tiny adobe with its tin roof, the pink-grapefruit tree in the back yard. She wonders if new tenants have moved in.

But maybe no one would want to rent the place after what happened there. She hopes that somebody is watering the grapefruit at least. It was an old tree, and temperamental—turning yellow and dropping its leaves if you ignored it for even a week.

How long has she been gone now? Seven months? The tree was probably dead.

THE GUY AT the to-go counter isn't the one from before, but she asks him anyway.

"Sorry," he says. "We don't offer samples."



"This window has a view of the park."

She touches her face, worried that some of the napkin is still stuck there. "Oh, O.K." She smiles. "Because they did yesterday—and the day before. Just, like, half a cup."

"Yeah, sorry, I can't do that."

"No, that's O.K." She holds her smile for a little longer, until it cracks.

There's a line of people behind her now, and she can feel the familiar rush of shame. It starts at the base of her neck and moves into her face—the heat of it almost makes her dizzy.

"Did you want to buy anything?" the guy asks.

"Let me think about it," she says, stepping aside, making a show of looking at the pastry case. "You can go ahead of me." She gestures toward the woman who's next in line and slowly slinks away, careful not to hit anyone with the skateboards. She feels like a walrus, too big for this gingerbread town.

The funny thing is, she has some money. But Evan doesn't like her to spend it—not frivolously, anyway, on pastry and coffee. He says they need to save it for when they get settled, maybe for a car. So far, they've set aside around fifteen hundred. In addition to what she gets from playing, they've worked some farms—picking or packing—and sometimes Evan makes these nifty pins from bottle caps; in the summer he sold a ton of them.

She approaches the bathroom and uses the code they gave her yesterday. It doesn't work. She steadies her shaking hand and reenters the numbers and letters into the keypad.

"New code," the counter guy calls out. "You get it when you order something."

She thinks to get back in line, pull out the roll of bills. But she's already made a fool of herself, and people are starting to stare.

OUTSIDE, THE COLD air startles her and she puts down the packs. She stuffs the skateboards inside, with their tops sticking out. In a better mood, she might have felt like Santa Claus. It'll be December soon, if it isn't already.

The men with their sleeping rolls are still in the plaza. There's no sign of Evan. If she were a normal person, she could just call him—but they no longer have working phones, just dead relics at the bottom of their bags.

A wing of white light cuts through the clouds—a merciless angel, it brings no warmth. She tugs her gloves back on, but they don't help. One of the drifters has spotted her—an older fellow with a beard that looks like it's made of mud. He lifts his hand and waves, as if he knew her. She hates to think of herself as one of them.

It's hard to say why anyone travels like this—the way she and Evan do.

When they first met and she asked if he had family, he said yes.

When he asked the same question, she said no.

Both answers bore witness to a story neither had the strength to tell. And what did it matter? All they needed to know was that she wished to leave behind an absence, and he wanted to become one.

Of course, over time they'd given each other clues, little comments laid down casually in the night like playing cards. No tears or drama. Just facts. Nearly deaf in his left ear from smacks. A bullet hole in her father's bedroom wall.

Shocked into travelling, she supposes. That seemed about right. Still, it was a choice. They weren't zombies. They knew what they were doing—Evan maybe more than she.

In the first few months after her father died, she'd only pretended to run away. She'd pack some things and head down to the Greyhound station on Congress Street, just to see how it might feel. She did it a few times, with all her money in her pocket, after which she'd go back to the old adobe and eat a bowl of ice cream.

Then one day Evan was at the station, with his crooked teeth and his anime eyes. He came over and smiled. "Nice board. You a skater?" She said she wasn't great.

"And a musician, too," he said. At which point she started to cry, and he held her.

It wasn't much more complicated than that.

Sometimes, though, she wonders at her decision—to just take off like that with a stranger. But the truth was, nothing had ever been easier. And it wasn't just the boy's eyes or some chemical thing. She'd trusted him immediately.

Of course, it was possible she hadn't

been thinking clearly. The blood, the bullet hole in the wall. What if she'd made a mistake?

WHEN SHE LOOKS up again, the man with the beard is walking toward her. The way his Lawrence of Arabia rags flap in the wind makes her seasick. She picks up her stuff, and the next thing she knows she's on her knees. Her yellow gloves look like starfish. She retches, but nothing comes up.

"You O.K.? Hey." She feels a hand on her back. "You want some water?"

"Please," she tells him, "just leave me alone."

But when she looks up it's not Lawrence of Arabia. It's a tall woman in a red parka and furry boots that look like teddy bears. The woman pulls a plastic bottle from one of her huge pockets.

"Poor thing, what did you eat? Did you eat rubbish?"

"I don't eat rubbish," the girl says.

"Well, that's good. Here, take a sip."

The girl accepts the water, but as soon as she drinks she's afraid she's going to be sick again. She wipes her mouth and hands back the bottle.

The woman keeps staring. She has a pale, wrinkled face and neat gray hair twisted into enormous braids the size of baguettes. She's clearly not a traveler. Her clothes are too clean, and she smells sweet, like lavender. She puts the water back into her parka and pulls out a bag of almonds. "You probably need some protein."

"I'm fine," the girl says, relieved to see that the bearded man has gone back to his buddies.

"You're not fine," the woman says. "Let me make you a cup of tea." She thrusts her hands back into her pockets, and for a moment the girl wonders if she's going to pull out a kettle.

Instead, she offers a tiny square of foil.

The girl stares at it, confused, wondering if it's chocolate.

"For your face."

The girl realizes that it's a moist towellette. She blushes and slips the thing into her pack.

"I live right around the corner," the woman says. "Come on—let me help you up."

"No, thank you. I have to go."

The girl stands on her own, tottering



slightly to the left. She picks up her stuff and walks away.

"You don't want the tea?" the woman calls after her.

The girl shakes her head and wobbles back toward the park.

SHE DECIDES TO walk up to the old reservoir. She and Evan had camped there for a week during the summer. On the trail, as she pivots at a switchback, she slips and nearly falls. She grabs an oak bush she hopes isn't poison. Cold air plummets from the mountaintop.

She can't do this. Why is she doing this? She does it because the reservoir is where Evan proposed to her, and where she accepted. It was late, they were tipsy on a bottle of wine—a rare treat. Maybe he was kidding, who knows. They've never discussed it again.

She keeps going until she sees the rusty tank and then a flash of water. It's such a relief she nearly forgets the pain in her toes.

But then she spots two high-school kids kissing solemnly on a blanket. In their shiny puffer coats they look like writhing larvae. Apart from them, there's no one up here. She watches

them longer than she should before turning away.

On the way down, she proceeds slowly and keeps her eyes on her feet. When finally the trail flattens out and she finds herself in a grove of peeling madrones, she eases off her pack and then throws Evan's to the ground. The banjo case she sets gently on a mound of leaves.

She's nauseated again, and starving. Why the fuck didn't she take the almonds? All she has is a few stale crackers.

"Where are you?" she screams.

There's an echo, and then footsteps.

"I'm right here," he says—a backlit silhouette at the entrance to the grove. "Look at your face." He laughs. "I didn't mean to scare you."

When he comes into view, she can see the horrible beard, the filthy cape. His voice has the South in it, and the hysterical keen of a chainsaw. He suggests helping her with her stuff.

She stands frozen as Lawrence of Arabia ambles closer, but when he reaches for her pack, the one with the money, she quickly snatches it up.

"I'll carry the other one," he says,

lifting Evan's bag from where she's thrown it.

"Whoa!" he says. "That's some heavy shit. What do you got in here—gold?"

"No, it's just—we just have some books. It's my boyfriend's," she says, trying to make the word meaningful.

The man nods as he works the shoulder straps into place.

"Really," she says, "I can carry it."

"So, where is he? Your friend?"

She doesn't know what to say. "I'm meeting him in, like, five minutes, so—"

"He'll want his books."

"Yes. He will." She extends her hand, waiting for the man to return the pack.

But he only stares at her. "You guys have enough blankets for tonight? Gonna need them."

"Yes, we're fine. Thanks. I really have to go."

He slips the bag off his shoulder, sets it on the ground, and begins to unzip it.

"Honestly, it's just books and underwear and . . ."

She's crying now, but the man doesn't stop. He's got Evan's blue sweater in his hands and then the box of crackers, and then he pulls out Herman Melville.

"Please don't touch anything." When she tries to stop him, he grabs her wrists.

"Don't be nasty," he says. "You have to learn to share."

He pushes her against a tree, and even though his hand is somewhere else, the girl feels it on her throat. She can't speak. She only squeaks. A shadow falls, as if to give them privacy. The man takes full advantage.

"Get the fuck away from her."

There's a sudden cracking sound, and the man yelps.

When he stumbles away, the girl cries, "Evan"—but when she looks she sees the old woman in the red parka, standing there with a long pole or maybe a branch. She whacks the man again, and he falls to his knees.

"Get your stuff," the woman instructs her.

The man rubs his head. "Crazy bitch."

"That's right," the woman says, raising the branch high and holding.

The girl shoves Evan's sweater and the Melville into the open backpack,

but she leaves the crackers, kicking them toward the fallen man. She knows she might run into him again. The road is like that. "Please," she says quietly. "Peace."

"You follow us and I'll have you arrested," the woman says.

The man picks up the crackers and leans over and starts to eat. He looks like an animal now, or a child.

SHE'S STILL SHAKING as the woman makes the tea. The house is so warm it feels like sickness. Neither of them, though, has taken off her coat—the girl because she hasn't been invited to do so. She can't recall the last time she was in a house. Maybe not since Tucson. Of course, she's been in stores and cafés and shelters, but this is different: the ordered mess of domesticity, the softness of the light. It's confusing.

The woman is talking, but the girl can't understand her. Something about men, and then something about egg salad.

"Can I use your bathroom, please?"

"Sure. Right down that hall, first door on the left."

The girl picks up her backpack.

"You can leave that here. It's perfectly safe."

"I need to get something," the girl says.

"O.K., I'm just telling you, I've locked all the doors, so no one's getting in. Plus, I've got my stick."

When the woman winks, the girl wonders if she wasn't better off with Lawrence of Arabia.

SHE CROUCHES BEFORE the toilet, shocked by how pleasant it smells, like a lake in springtime. Something churns in her gut. But when nothing comes she moves away from the bowl and sets to work on the pack, pulling out her clothes and tampons and toothbrush, digging to the bottom for the bloated roll of bills. She'll put it in her jacket and then steal some toilet paper; tell the woman she has to go. She realizes now that she should have stayed in the empty lot this morning, despite the lady across the way. *If we ever get separated, Evan once told her, go back to where we last saw each other and wait.*

Maybe she'll steal some Q-tips, too, some Band-Aids.

Her hands are still aflutter, and so she empties the rest of the bag onto the floor. She doesn't see the money.

O.K., O.K., she thinks, I put it where, before I went to sleep?—and though she knows exactly where she put the roll of bills, she's sticking her hands into pant legs and sweaters, into filthy socks and underwear. She keeps looking long after she understands why the money isn't there.

She nods and then nods again, slowly doing it with her whole body—a kind of rocking. *Evan has the money. Evan who she can't find.* A funny sound comes from her mouth. It doesn't stop.

"Are you O.K. in there?"

The woman's voice is close to the door.

"Fuck off," the girl says, before leaning over the bowl to vomit.

SWEATING, SHE PEELS off her coat and then the jacket underneath. For a while, in the bathroom, she stares at her hands, appalled by their lack of faith.

Her teeth are chattering, too.

When she opens a small window, it lets in no relief. A scolding sound of leaves, the empty smell of snow. Her thoughts kneel like beggars.

It wasn't possible he'd do something like this. There had to be another explanation—someone else to blame.

The room spins, laughing at her—because of course she'd said similar things about her father. *Someone could have broken into the house. A bullet hole in the wall! How do you explain that?* She'd shouted these things at the social worker.

"I know," the man had replied patiently. "But what you have to understand is it's not uncommon for a person to miss, the first time. His hands were probably shaking."

SHE DRINKS THE flowery tea, not saying much. She apologizes for cursing.

The woman keeps talking, but the girl's thoughts get in the way of conversation.

It doesn't make sense. Why would he leave his stuff behind—his favorite blue sweater, his skateboard?

Because it's worthless crap, she answers herself. Evan can replace every bit

of it a hundred times over with the money. She thinks of all the times he made her beg or busk in the rain.

Fucking asshole.

"You can't trust them," the woman says, and the girl wonders how much she's said out loud.

She stands and reaches for her coat. "I better go." Despite everything, she's still hoping Evan's out there. "Thanks for the tea."

The woman nods. She's taken off her parka and even undone her giant braids. On the table, there are orange peels and half-eaten sandwiches. There's snow on the windowsill. The girl's not sure when all of this has happened.

"Do you want me to pack up this food for you?"

"You don't have to."

Glancing at the snow, she wonders how she'll make it to the shelter. She could ask the woman for a ride, but the woman's done enough. Even now, she's packing up not only the leftover sandwiches but also grapes and cookies and almonds. She puts them into separate baggies. The cookies she inserts carefully, so they don't break.

It does something to the girl, watching this.

"Oh, honey, you're shivering. Do you want to take a bath before you go?"

She touches the girl's shoulder. "You can use the big tub upstairs."

"I just—no—I need to find my friend. I have his stuff."

The woman frowns, but says she understands. "You know, I was mauled by a bear once."

"Excuse me?"

"In Alaska. Made a real mess of me."

The girl isn't sure what to say. She thinks to tell the truth, say that she's stolen a roll of toilet paper. Instead, she asks the woman if she's ever read "Moby-Dick."

"Oh God, yes," the woman says. "Dreadful book."

THEY'RE IN THE car now, but everything looks different, dusted with snow. The plaza is empty—no men, only a frozen swarm of Christmas lights. The girl's disoriented. Without her feet on the pavement, she has no sense of direction and can't recall exactly where it was she camped last night.

"It was by the railroad tracks," she

says. "And I think there was a playground pretty close."

"Say no more." The woman makes a sudden left. "I know the spot."

When they pull up to the empty lot, she isn't sure it's right—the dirt graded in white and the scrappy weeds glazed to silver.

But then she sees the big flat rock where she and Evan had eaten their dinner of kipper snacks and crackers—though the rock's now under a bun of snow.

"I'll be right back," she says.

"Why?" asks the woman. "There's no one there."

"I'll take my stuff," the girl says. "You don't have to wait."

"I'll wait," the woman tells her.

Before stepping out of the car, the girl hesitates. There are no footprints on the delicate crystals. It seems like a place one shouldn't disturb—a church or a just-cleaned floor. She walks past the big rock and looks down at the spot where she and Evan had slept. There's no evidence of them. She kneels on the ground, wishing the woman weren't watching.

She feels like digging. Maybe the money fell out of her pack. Maybe Evan didn't take it before he left. Maybe—why the fuck not?—they'll get married in the spring. She takes off her point-less gloves and sends her hands down to where the earth is warmer. All she finds, though, is a wadded tissue.

She can't help but think of her father. The white putty plugging the hole in the wall. Maybe they put something similar in his skull—who knows. After they removed his body from the bedroom, she never saw it again. And the coffin had been closed.

She scoops up some snow and undoes it in her fist, throttling it back to water. It's no longer surprising to her that a person would want to die.

Time to grow up, Evan had said.

She's twenty now. She understands everything.

BACK AT THE woman's house, she's so cold that she moves with a regal slowness, like a shipwrecked queen trudging toward shore.

"Sit here," the woman says, directing her to a plush red chair in the living room. On both sides of it are heating grates roaring fever. "You'll be O.K. You

just need to rest. Travelling takes a lot out of you."

For the past ten minutes, the woman's been describing a backpacking trip she took forty years ago to Nepal. "I've never eaten so many lentils. Have you been to Nepal?"

Maybe, the girl thinks, she hasn't explained her predicament sufficiently and it's her own fault that she's been mistaken for a more civilized kind of traveller—maybe a long-distance hiker in between care packages.

"And then we went down to India. This was after college, with my friend Ginny."

The girl closes her eyes. The house smells rustic, a mixture of mold and flowers and snuffed-out candles.

"She was a great lover of mountains, Ginny. A real cragswoman."

Somewhere, a clock is chewing something. The girl can feel her hair swimming in the flow of heated air.

"Shall we have a little sherry?"

The girl opens her eyes.

"Or do you want to have a shower first? Yes, why don't you? And then we can just relax. I'll put your things in the room at the end of the hall."

The girl doesn't want to move, but possibly she smells unpleasant.

"There are clean towels in the closet," the woman says. "Maybe use the brown ones."

THE HOT WATER is first cruelty and then something like God. She wants to stay in here forever, become a saint, a fleshless thing with glittering bones.

Stay in here until she can forgive him.

The shower's an open cave, no door or curtain, and there's a mirror across the room in which she can see her body. She expects to see a child, but she sees only the truth—the hairy legs, the purple bruises on her shoulders. She turns away and scrubs all of it with a bar of black soap that smells like milk.

She wonders if Evan is in a room, too, having a wash, or maybe he's already in a hitch, heading south. Probably to California. He said he'd never go back to Tucson. She doesn't cry, because in some way she's already shed those tears.

Still, she can feel his chapped lips at her ears, her breasts, whispering things into her that she'll never forget. Terrible

SEEN

Nature that wants to fill in

the gap the Falls

falls in and the eye falls

on: that

extends a bewildering

eye & in its in

exact

ness——no

less a widen

ing makes than what my

mind made too much

of when you

planted a tree in it.

—Michele Glazer

things about his family, breathless things about their future. The stunned blue marbles of his eyes, that strange yelp of his. She's always known he was crazy, but she never expected something like this. Not from the boy who stayed facing her after they fucked, gently thumbing her eyebrows as if trying to remove a smudge.

THERE'S A CLEAN nightgown laid out in the room where the woman's put her stuff. It's a flannel thing with a high neck that makes the girl think of Mary Poppins. Beside it is a note: *Please put this on.*

She wants to laugh, but all that comes from her mouth is a pant. As she slips the gown over her head, she's shocked by its softness, the way it butters the rough patches on her back. When she walks into the living room, the woman's kneeling before the hearth. She's in a nightgown, too—disturbingly similar.

"Give me one second. I've almost got this lit."

A moment later, there's a dull boom as the flames jump.

"Good! Now we're set." The woman stands slowly—some difficulty with

her knees. On a small table is a glass decanter filled with straw-colored liquid. There are two glasses, one with a few dregs in it and the ghost of lipstick. When the girl looks up she sees that, indeed, the woman has put on some makeup.

"Shall I pour?"

"Not for me." And then, when she sees the woman's disappointed face: "Well, maybe just a little. I don't really drink."

"Why—are you pregnant?"

"What?"

"Well, all that nausea this morning."

"No, I just—"

"Anyway, it's none of my business." The woman pours generously. "Either way, a little sherry won't hurt you."

When the girl takes a sip, it's not at all what she'd expected. The liquor's not sweet; it tastes like something made from old furniture and walnuts.

The woman sits on the sofa and pulls her legs up like a teen-ager, pats the place beside her.

The girl hesitates and says, if it's O.K., she'd rather sit by the fire.

"NO MORE," she says, as the woman refills her glass.

The room's a blur and she's desperate to go to sleep, blot out the day. But it's as if she were in school, waiting for the bell to ring. The woman won't shut up.

"You know," she says, "I've had quite a few adventures myself."

"Yes, you said."

"Well, you know about Nepal, but I've also been to . . ."

The stories pile up. The woman chugging kava with Fijians and braving temple food in Rajasthan.

The girl nods dutifully. Out the window, the snow has stopped and, in the dim light of the garden lamps, she sees someone standing there.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, I just—" She realizes it's a deer. "I think I'm a little tipsy."

"Me, too," the woman says. "This is nice, isn't it?"

Beyond the walls, the hum of the freeway—a gentle *shush*, like the ocean.

Evan had said they'd go back to the coast next summer. Back to the beach where they'd seen no whales,

only tankers floating precariously on the horizon.

"I told you about the bear, didn't I? That was on another trip with my friend Ginny." The woman's lips are slightly smeared now. There's some sherry on her nightgown. "That was a pretty good vacation, despite everything. Well, you know how it is when you're travelling, ups and downs. So, when are you heading home?"

The girl feels something like anger. She wants to tell the woman that she's not on a fucking vacation. She wants to say that she lied earlier, that she *has* eaten rubbish, that she's done it often. She wants to take off her socks and expose her feet, which, after seven months, are swollen and poxed with blisters.

Instead, she shrugs and puts down her glass, touches her belly.

She feels sick, bloated, forced to eat this woman's stories. It doesn't seem right to know this much about a stranger. It occurs to her that she knows more about this old woman than she does about Evan. She even knows where this woman was the day her mother died: "On a boat, headed toward Spain. I got a telegram!"

Still, she doesn't know the woman's name, and the woman doesn't know hers.

The girl bares her teeth and says nothing.

"YOU KNOW WHAT I'd love?"

The girl is nodding off. "I'm sorry, what did you—"

"Wait. Let me get it." The woman stands, rubs her knees, and disappears into the hallway.

The girl feels woozy. She stares at the bowls of tidbits on the coffee table. Neither of them has eaten much of it, but now that the woman's gone the girl stuffs a handful of cheese cubes into her mouth. As she chews them into glue, she watches the fire, a glowing wound of embers.

A clock on the mantelpiece reads 10:18. Usually by nine she and Evan are on the ground, often in the same sack. Often naked. She leans back on the cushions and gives in to the weight of her lids. She thinks about all those books she has to carry. Half of Melville's life. She pictures him, a hairy

man with a harpoon. When a hand brushes her arm, she jumps.

It's the woman, setting the banjo case on the couch. "I hope you don't mind my going into your room. I thought it might be nice to have a little music."

The girl feels a sudden rush of heat. She swallows, shakes her head. "No."

"Oh, come on." The woman's voice rises childishly. "Play something."

"No—I really can't."

The woman frowns and pours herself more sherry. "I mean, you'd think I'd be entitled to ask."

"Yes, of course, it's just I'm—I'm really tired."

"Oh, she's tired now." The woman rises and lurches toward the fireplace, lifting the poker and smashing a blackened log to sparks. One flies to the carpet and chars it. "You know, all you girls are the same. When it's your turn to give . . ." The woman thrusts the poker again, leaning unsteadily against the bricks. "I suppose you only do it for money."

"Excuse me?" The girl stands and reaches for her case. "I really need to go to bed."

"Oh, so you're *staying* here?" the woman says imperiously.

The girl flushes, looks away. She says she'll pack her bags.

"No." The woman puts down the poker and grimaces. "Oh, my God, I always do this." She steps on the smok-



ing cinder. "Please," she says. "I'm sorry. Please don't go."

She says it so many times that the girl starts to cry.

THEY SIT FOR a long time in the stifling room, not speaking, though the woman seems to be doing some sort of breathing exercise. The girl, troubled by the sound, takes the banjo from its velvet bed and places it, properly, on her lap. It's been a while since she held the

instrument this way. On the streets, she's always standing up, and the banjo's fairly heavy. When it rests on her lap, she's got more freedom to find just the right angle. She can practically feel his hands at her side, adjusting her posture. The lessons she hated as a child.

She chooses a simple song, one of the first she learned. As soon as she begins, though, she wants to stop. The sound's so rich it frightens her. The way it flies from the instrument but doesn't dissipate like it does when she plays outdoors. Here the notes can't escape; they hit the walls and ceiling and circle back to her.

Even with her too long nails and the frets sounding a little fuzzy, she can hear the music well enough to perfect it with each new round. Leaning in, she claw-hammers the melody, gathering speed as she goes. *Imping*, her father had called this sort of frenzied picking.

When she finishes, it's with a sweeping flourish that's not for show; it's the imp, breaking loose and fleeing. Where it goes the girl can never understand.

She hopes the woman won't applaud.

It's like a test, this hard-earned silence; only a fool would squander it.

The woman blinks drunkenly and yawns.

SHE SEES HIM all night, his body breaking from the water, the white skin pierced with sticks. When he goes under again, she follows him. The sound, a whining bass.

She asks him why he's crying.

He says, "I have no mother."

When she pulls a spear from his side, there are slow red clouds that smell like rain.

IN THE MORNING the house is jumpy with light, sudden glints off melting snow. The girl puts a blanket over the woman, who's asleep on the couch. In the kitchen, she eats a tangerine and a few spoons of yogurt. Then she creeps to her room and goes through the packs, winnowing them down to what's essential.

She keeps Evan's blue sweater and his black hoodie, the warmest of his filthy socks. She keeps a few of his painted bottle caps. Then, stupidly, for luck, she grabs the Melville. The rest of his clothing, along with some of her own—tattered summer dresses and hopeless underwear—she chucks into a bin in the

garage. She puts the extra sleeping roll and the two skateboards in an empty box marked "Donations." The remaining books she sneaks into gaps in the bedroom's shelf of paperbacks.

What's left fits into a single bag, but when she lifts this onto her shoulder it frightens her. She pictures Evan face down in a ditch. Maybe she should call the police.

"You're up already?"

The woman is standing in the doorway. In the sun, her bloated face is a road map of wrinkles. The way she lingers outside the room embarrasses the girl. That anyone should feel shame in her own house is awful.

"You can come in," the girl says. "I left you some books I was finished with."

The woman nods, then points to the nightgown on the bed. "You're not taking that?"

When the girl mentions the police, the woman says, "I'm sure your friend is fine. It's you I'm concerned about. Please—why don't you take the nightgown."

"No. I'd ruin it in, like, five minutes." The girl picks it up, tries to fold it better. "But—I don't know—maybe you could drive me to the freeway?"

The woman stiffens and attempts a smile. "I'll make some breakfast."

WHEN SHE SEES the sign for the interstate, her heart begins to thump.

Maybe the woman can hear it, too. "I'm not comfortable leaving you by the side of a road." She slows down and reaches into her purse. "At least let me give you something for the books." She pulls out some bills, too many. "Don't argue. Take it."

"It's just a cookbook and some stupid car-repair thing."

"Well, I do neither of those things well, so . . ."

"Maybe just drop me off up there by the gas station."

"No, that's not a good area. I'll leave you by the Denny's."

When the girl spots some travellers near the traffic light, she rolls down the window, just to be sure.

Evan isn't with them, of course, though she can't stop looking back. She's still sick with worry.

"Just leave me here," she says. "I can go with them."

The woman glances into the rearview



"It's another Sicilian message. It means 'Please disregard the previous Sicilian message—it was inadvertently sent to everyone on our list.'"

mirror. "I doubt they want company."

The girl sees now that the travellers are holding hands—teen-agers with matching dreadlocks, their packs rising behind them like a private city.

The car rolls past the Denny's, and before the girl can protest the woman turns left—a long, curving loop that feels like an amusement-park ride.

"Where are you—"

The woman accelerates and merges onto the freeway, the wet road bordered by slush.

"Stop," the girl says. "This is fine."

But the woman only laughs. The road sounds like a river and is blinding with puddles of light.

"There are sunglasses in the glove box," the woman says. "Would you grab them?"

The girl feels queasy again. After she hands over the glasses, she leans back and closes her eyes. She tells the woman she'll get out at the first rest stop.

The woman says nothing—and then, after a while: "I'm Kathryn, by the way."

Then they're quiet, letting the freeway thrash its tail behind them, sending up sprays of water. When they zoom past the rest stop, the girl steadies her trembling hands and says, "Where are we going?"

"I'll take you home," the woman says.

The girl shakes her head at the ridiculous word.

But then she thinks of the grapefruit tree. "Tucson is, like, over a thousand miles."

"Don't worry," the woman says. "I'm a good driver. I took a lot of road trips with Ginny."

The girl suspects that they were more than road trips—probably some kind of love story.

"So you were attacked by a bear once?"

"Oh, yes. And I have the scars to prove it. I'm sure he would have killed me had I not punched him in the face."

"That's what you're supposed to do," the girl says, remembering what Evan had taught her. "Or you wave your arms and shout at them."

"Yes, exactly. You make yourself bigger than you are."

The girl wonders how on earth a person could do that.

But the following year, just before she delivered the baby, she understood how it was possible. How there was a certain point when you were no longer what you were; when you became like the largest animal that ever existed—and no one, no one, could fuck with you. ♦

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Victor Lodato on the short story as a fling.

THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE HISTORY TEST

Constitutional interpretation reaches back to the dawn of time.

BY JILL LEPORE

ON THE NIGHT of April 9, 1931, James M. Kiley, thirty-nine, was shot with a .32-calibre pistol at a gas station in Somerville, Massachusetts, during a botched holdup. Kiley, the night manager, had twenty-four dollars in his pocket; the cash in the register was untouched. Herman Snyder, nineteen, was found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to death. “Well, that’s that,” Snyder said, when the jury delivered the verdict. But that wasn’t that. Snyder filed an appeal arguing that his constitutional rights had been violated: during his trial, when the judge, the jury, lawyers for both sides, and a court stenographer visited the gas station, the judge refused to allow Snyder to go along. Even Lizzie Borden had been offered a chance to go with the jury to the crime scene, Snyder’s lawyers pointed out, and so had Sacco and Vanzetti.

In the summer of 1933, Snyder’s lawyers went to see Louis Brandeis, the Supreme Court Justice, at his summer home, on Cape Cod; Brandeis, in an extraordinary gesture from the highest court, issued a stay of execution. The Court agreed to hear the appeal, and, in January, 1934, upheld Snyder’s conviction in a 5–4 opinion that proposed a standard for measuring the weight of tradition in fundamental-rights cases, a standard sometimes known as the history test.

Some rights, like freedom of religion, are written down, which doesn’t always make them easier to secure; and some, like the right to marry, aren’t, which doesn’t mean that they’re less fundamental. The Constitution, as originally drafted, did not include a bill of rights. At the time, a lot of people thought that listing rights was a bad idea because, in

a republic, the people retain all the rights not specifically granted to the government and because anything written down is both limited and open to interpretation. “What is the liberty of the press?” Alexander Hamilton asked. “Who can give it any definition which would not leave the utmost latitude for evasion?” These were excellent questions, but Hamilton lost the argument. The Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791. Past the question of *which* rights there remained the question of *whose* rights. In 1857, in *Dred Scott*, the Supreme Court asked whether any “negro whose ancestors were imported into this country and sold as slaves” is “entitled to all the rights, and privileges, and immunities” guaranteed in the Constitution. Relying on “historical facts,” the Court answered no, arguing that, at the time of the framing, black people “had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.” After Emancipation, the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, cast off the shackles of history with this guarantee: “No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” Then, in a series of cases in the early twentieth century, the courts began applying parts of the Bill of Rights to the states, mainly by way of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Yet how would judges decide what

rights fall under the definition of due process and equal protection? There seemed to be two possibilities: precedent and reasonable judgment. In *Snyder v. Massachusetts*, Snyder’s attorneys argued that Snyder had a fundamental right to go on the trip to the gas station, under the due-process clause. But Justice Benjamin Cardozo, writing for the majority, said that the question turned not only on a reasonable reading of the Fourteenth Amendment or on precedent but also on whether refusing to bring a defendant with the jury to the crime scene “offends some principle of justice so rooted in the traditions and conscience of our people as to be ranked as fundamental.” He then recited instances, going back to 1747, to show that what Snyder had been denied did not meet this standard.

History, in one fashion or another, has a place in most constitutional arguments, as it does in most arguments of any kind, even those about whose turn it is to wash the dishes. Generally, appeals to tradition provide little relief for people who, historically, have been treated unfairly by the law. You can’t fight segregation, say, by an appeal to tradition; segregation was an entrenched American tradition. In 1896, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, essentially reprising *Dred*, cited the “established usages, customs, and traditions of the people” in affirming the constitutionality of Jim Crow laws. In 1954, to challenge such laws, *Brown v. Board of Education* disavowed historical analysis and cited, instead, social science: empirical data. Meanwhile, Snyder was chiefly cited in appeals of murder convictions involving defendants who claimed that their rights had been violated. In 1945, Justice William O. Douglas

ABOVE: BRIAN REA



History written to win legal arguments has a different authority from history written to find out what happened.

cited Snyder in a 5–4 decision reversing the conviction of a Georgia sheriff who had arrested a young black man for stealing a tire and then beaten him to death. The killing was “shocking and revolting,” Douglas wrote, but it was impossible to know whether the victim’s civil rights had been violated. In a fierce dissent, Francis Murphy argued that the reversal was absurd: “Knowledge of a comprehensive law library is unnecessary for officers of the law to know that the right to murder individuals in the course of their duties is unrecognized in this nation.”

But, in recent decades, the history test applied in cases like Snyder has quietly taken a special place; it has been used to help determine the constitutionality of everything from assisted suicide to deportation, by the unlikely route of judicial decisions about sex. History’s place in American jurisprudence took a turn in 1973, in *Roe v. Wade*, when the Court dusted off its incunabula and looked into what “history reveals about man’s attitudes toward the abortion procedure over the centuries,” as Justice Harry Blackmun explained. Abortion had not been a crime in Britain’s North American colonies, nor was it a crime in most parts of the United States until after the Civil War. “It perhaps is not generally appreciated that the restrictive criminal abortion laws in effect in a majority of States today are of relatively recent vintage,”

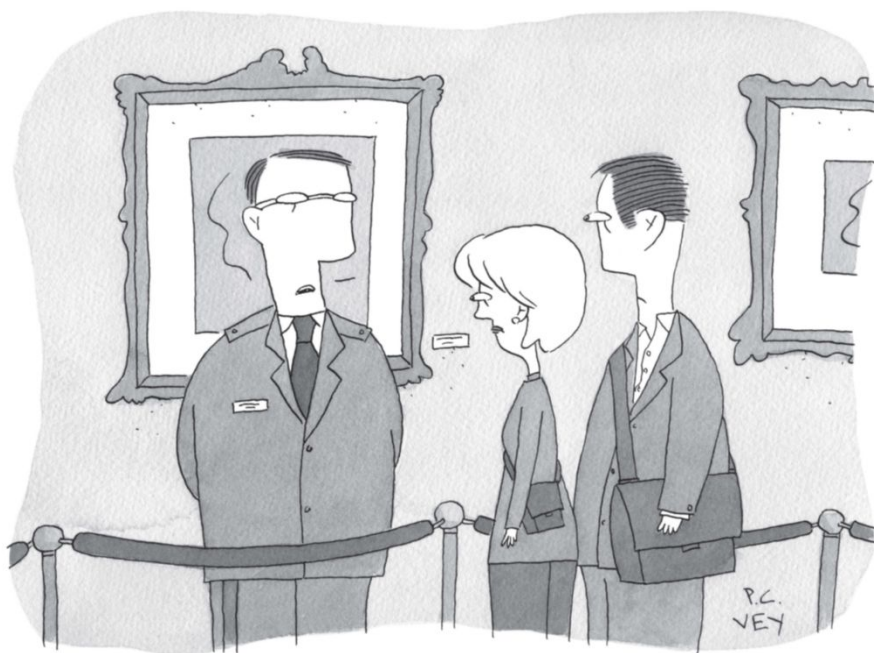
Blackmun wrote. In turning back the hands of time, he didn’t stop there. “We are told that, at the time of the Persian Empire, abortifacients were known, and that criminal abortions were severely punished. We are also told, however, that abortion was practiced in Greek times as well as in the Roman Era, and that ‘it was resorted to without scruple.’” Roe overturned laws passed by state legislatures by appealing to ancient history. William Rehnquist, in his dissent, cited Snyder: “The fact that a majority of the States reflecting, after all, the majority sentiment in those States, have had restrictions on abortions for at least a century is a strong indication, it seems to me, that the asserted right to an abortion is not ‘so rooted in the traditions and conscience of our people as to be ranked as fundamental.’”

Not coincidentally, liberals began applying the history test to fundamental-rights cases at the very moment that women and minorities were entering the historical profession and writing history that liberal-minded judges might be able to cite. Conservatives, meanwhile, defined a new historical method: originalism, a method with roots in the kind of analysis made in *Dred Scott*. Originalism is essentially a very tightly defined history test. Snyder’s invocation of “the traditions and conscience of our people” is like a reader’s pass to the

library stacks. There is virtually no end of places in the historical record to look for the traditions and conscience of our people, especially when “our people” is everyone. Originalism, a term coined in 1980, asks judges to read only the books on a single shelf in the library: the writings of delegates to the Constitutional Convention and the ratifying conventions, the *Federalist Papers*, and a handful of other newspapers and pamphlets published between 1787 and 1791 (and, occasionally, public records relating to debates over subsequent amendments, especially the Fourteenth). Even more narrowly, some originalists insist on consulting only documents that convey the “public understanding” of the writings of these great men. “If someone found a letter from George Washington to Martha telling her that what he meant by the power to lay taxes was not what other people meant,” Robert Bork once wrote, “that would not change our reading of the Constitution in the slightest.”

Roe, along with a series of civil-rights decisions made by the Warren Court, fuelled the growth of a conservative legal movement. The Federalist Society, founded in a number of law schools in 1982, developed an intellectual tradition, promoted scholarship, and sought to place its members on the courts. (Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas, along with Neil Gorsuch, who has been nominated to join them, are affiliated with the Federalist Society.) Within five years of its founding, the society had chapters at more than seventy law schools.

In 1985, in a speech to the Federalist Society, Ronald Reagan’s Attorney General, Edwin Meese, announced that “the Administration’s approach to constitutional interpretation” was to be “rooted in the text of the Constitution as illuminated by those who drafted, proposed, and ratified it.” He called this a “jurisprudence of original intention,” and contrasted it with the “misuse of history” by jurists who saw, in the Constitution’s “spirit,” things like “concepts of human dignity,” with which they had turned the Constitution into a “charter for judicial activism.” Meese’s statement met with a reply from Justice William Brennan, who said that anyone who had ever studied in the archives knew better than to believe that the records of the Constitutional Convention and the ratifying conventions



“For a better look at the painting, go to our Web site.”

offered so certain, exact, and singular a verdict as that which Meese expected to find there. (Obama's Supreme Court nominee Merrick B. Garland clerked for Brennan.) Brennan called the idea that modern judges could discern the framers' original intention "little more than arrogance cloaked as humility."

In opposing fundamental-rights arguments, though, the Reagan-era Court used not only originalist arguments but also the history test. In June, 1986, the Court ruled, 5–4, in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, that the right to engage in homosexual sex was not rooted in tradition; instead, *prohibitions* on homosexual sex were rooted in tradition. Justice Byron White, writing for the majority, said that these prohibitions had "ancient roots." In a concurring opinion, Justice Lewis Powell wrote, "I cannot say that conduct condemned for hundreds of years has now become a fundamental right." Blackmun, in his dissent, argued against this use of history: "I cannot agree that either the length of time a majority has held its convictions or the passions with which it defends them can withdraw legislation from this Court's scrutiny."

Antonin Scalia joined the Court in the next term. And, soon afterward, in 1987, Reagan had the opportunity to appoint another Justice, and named Robert Bork. Less than an hour after the nomination was announced, Senator Edward M. Kennedy called for Democrats to resist what he described as Reagan's attempt to "impose his reactionary vision of the Constitution on the Supreme Court and on the next generation of Americans." Laurence Tribe, the Harvard law professor, testified in opposition to Bork's nomination. But concerns about Bork's vantage on history were not limited to liberal legal scholars. His most determined critics included the federal judge Richard Posner, who wrote of Bork's views, "There are other reasons for obeying a judicial decision besides the Court's ability to display, like the owner of a champion airedale, an impeccable pedigree for the decision, connecting it to its remote eighteenth-century ancestor." In retrospect, the way this debate reached the public was mostly a distraction. The press generally reduced the disagreement to a stubbornly partisan battle in which conservatives and the past squared off against liberals and the future, and missed most

of what was at stake: the relationship between history and the law.

Scalia was the Court's most determined and eloquent originalist, but he also frequently invoked tradition. In 1989, writing for the majority in *Michael H. v. Gerald M.*, a case involving the assertion of parental visitation rights, he argued that finding rights "rooted in history and tradition" required identifying the "most specific" tradition; Brennan, in his dissent, questioned Scalia's method, writing that the opinion's "exclusively historical analysis portends a significant and unfortunate departure from our prior cases and from sound constitutional decisionmaking." As he had in his debate with Meese, Brennan charged Scalia with something between ignorance and duplicity. "It would be comforting to believe that a search for 'tradition' involves nothing more idiosyncratic or complicated than poring through dusty volumes on American history," Brennan wrote, but history is more complicated than that, "because reasonable people can disagree about the content of particular traditions, and because they can disagree even about which traditions are relevant." Even more fundamentally, Brennan argued that the appeal to tradition essentially nullifies the Fourteenth Amendment, whose whole point was to guarantee constitutional protections to those Americans who had not been protected by the traditions and consciences of other Americans.

If less carefully observed than the debate over originalism, the debate over the history test has influenced judicial nominations for decades. "A core question is whether, in examining this nation's history and tradition, the Court will protect only those interests supported by a specific and longlasting tradition, or whether the Court will not so constrict its analysis," Senator Joseph Biden said during hearings on David Souter's nomination, in 1990. (Biden had been coached by Tribe.) Souter's answer—"It has got to be a quest for reliable evidence, and there may be reliable evidence of great generality"—satisfied Democrats. Liberal legal scholars, meanwhile, had grown increasingly alarmed by Scalia's use of history: in a 1990 case, for example, he cited a book written in 1482 in a narrowing definition of due process, and in a 1991 case he cited punishments

imposed during the reign of James II to uphold a mandatory life sentence without the possibility of parole for the possession of six hundred and fifty grams of cocaine. The legal scholar Erwin Chemerinsky argued that conservatives on the Court had turned to history-test historicism because originalism is so patently flawed as a mode of constitutional interpretation. (The framers weren't originalists; *Brown v. Board* can't be squared with originalism; originalism can't be reconciled with democratic self-government.) "The constant use of history to justify conservative results leads to the cynical conclusion that the country has a seventeenth century Court as it enters the twenty-first century," Chemerinsky wrote in 1993. "It is not enough to make one want to take all the history books out of the Supreme Court's library, but it makes one come close."

OR YOU COULD write new history books. Geoffrey R. Stone, a distinguished professor and a former dean of the University of Chicago Law School, is a past chairman of the American Constitution Society, which was founded, in 2001, as an answer to the Federalist Society. His new book, "Sex and the Constitution: Sex, Religion, and Law from America's Origins to the Twenty-first Century" (Liveright), locates "America's origins" in antiquity. Applying the history test to the regulation of sex, Stone begins his inquiry in the sixth century B.C.E., and expands into a learned, illuminating, and analytical compendium that brings together the extraordinary research of a generation of historians in service of a constitutional call to arms.

Stone started working on the book about a decade ago, not long after the Court reversed *Bowers*. In *Lawrence v. Texas*, in 2003, the majority opinion overturned state sodomy laws by rejecting the history presented as evidence in *Bowers*. Colonial anti-sodomy laws did exist, Kennedy wrote in *Lawrence*, but they applied to everyone, not just to men; also, they were hardly ever enforced and "it was not until the 1970's that any State singled out same-sex relations for criminal prosecution, and only nine States have done so." In short, Kennedy wrote, "the historical grounds relied upon in *Bowers* are more complex than the majority opinion and the concurring opin-

ion by Chief Justice Burger indicate."

The tables had turned. Between *Bowers* and *Lawrence*, academic historians had produced a considerable body of scholarship about the regulation of sexuality, on which the Court was able to draw. Scalia, in an uncharacteristically incoherent dissent, mainly fumed about this, arguing that "whether homosexual sodomy was prohibited by a law targeted at same-sex sexual relations or by a more general law prohibiting both homosexual and heterosexual sodomy, the only relevant point is that it *was* criminalized—which suffices to establish that homosexual sodomy is not a right 'deeply rooted in our Nation's history and tradition.'" Scalia, in effect, accused the majority of doing too much historical research.

The inconsistency is perhaps best explained by the Court's wish to pretend that it is not exercising judicial discretion. One legal scholar has suggested that the history test is like Dumbo's feather. Dumbo can fly because he's got big ears, but he doesn't like having big ears, so he decides he can fly because he's got a magic feather. The Court has got big, activist ears; it would rather believe it's got a magical history feather.

Lately, the field of argument, if not always of battle, in many fundamental-rights cases has moved from the parchment pages of the Constitution to the clay of Mesopotamia. In *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the 2015 Supreme Court decision that overturned state bans on same-sex marriage, Justice Kennedy, writing for the majority, reached back almost to the earliest written records of human societies. "From their beginning to their most recent page, the annals of human history reveal the transcendent importance of marriage," he said. "Since the dawn of history, marriage has transformed strangers into relatives, binding families and societies together." He cited Confucius. He quoted Cicero. The states that wanted to ban same-sex marriage described its practice as a betrayal of that history, but Kennedy saw it as a continuation, a testament to "the enduring importance of marriage." Marriage is an institution with "ancient origins," Kennedy said, but that doesn't mean it's changeless. Scalia, in a heated dissent, called Kennedy's opinion "silly" and "pretentious." As a matter of historical analysis, Scalia mostly confined himself to

the past century and a half. "When the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified in 1868, every State limited marriage to one man and one woman, and no one doubted the constitutionality of doing so," he said. "That resolves these cases."

Liberal legal scholars disagree, and Stone's "Sex and the Constitution" is an attempt to pull together all their evidence, for the sake of court battles to come. Ancient Greeks, Romans, and Jews believed that sex was natural and didn't have a lot of rules about it, Stone argues. Early Christians, influenced by Augustine of Hippo, who in the fifth century decided that Adam and Eve had been thrown out of the Garden of Eden because of lust, decided that sex was a sin, and condemned all sorts of things, including masturbation. Stone speculates that the medieval church's condemnation of same-sex sex, a concern that emerged in the eleventh century and that became pronounced in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, was a consequence of a new requirement: clerical celibacy. According to Stone, Aquinas argued that the sins of mutual masturbation, oral sex, and anal sex were worse if they involved two members of the same sex, a position that became church dogma in the sixteenth century.

During the Reformation, Protestants redeemed one kind of sex: intercourse between a married man and woman. (Martin Luther argued that sex was as "necessary to the nature of man as eating and drinking.") Protestants also rejected the Catholic Church's condemnation of contraception. But they believed that governments ought to regulate sexual behavior for the sake of public order. In the seventeenth century, most of England's American colonies had an established religion, an arrangement that, a revolution later, they abdicated.

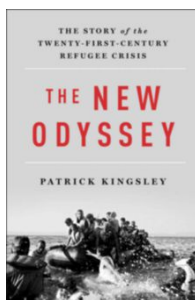
Enlightenment philosophers rejected Christian teachings about sex, and, believing in the pursuit of happiness, they believed, too, in the pursuit of pleasure. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights say nothing about sex, of any kind, with anyone, under any circumstances. Nor do any of the original state constitutions. Nor did any laws in any of the states, at the time of the founding, forbid sexual expression, or abortion before quickening, and sodomy laws were seldom enforced. That changed in the first half of

the nineteenth century, when a religious revival led states to pass new laws, including the first law against obscenity. A campaign against the long-standing practice of abortion began, followed by a crusade against contraception and, at the turn of the twentieth century, the persecution of homosexuals. The cases from Roe to Lawrence to Obergefell, Stone suggests, constitute a revolution, not a turning away but a turning back, toward the Enlightenment.

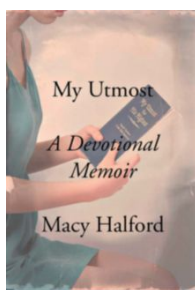
History written to win a legal argument has a different claim to authority than history written to find out what happened. In a study of sex, Stone might have been interested in any number of practices, but he has confined his investigation to matters that are sources of ongoing constitutional and political debate in the United States today: abortion, contraception, obscenity, and sodomy or homosexuality. Practices that were once crimes, like fornication and adultery, or that are still crimes, like incest, infanticide, and rape, generally lie outside the scope of his concern. This has the effect of obscuring the relationship between things he's interested in and things he's not interested in, and it introduces a circularity: he has defined the scope of his study by drawing a line between what's criminal and what's not, when how that line came to be drawn is the subject of his study.

The history of the regulation of sexuality, especially the parts he's chosen to gloss over—which happen to be parts that particularly concern the vulnerability of women and children—is a chronicle of a staggeringly long reign of sanctioned brutality. That reign rests on a claim on the bodies of women and children, as a right of property, made by men. “The page of history teems with woman’s wrongs,” Sarah Grimké wrote in 1837. Stone only skimmed that page. Or consider this page, from the *Congressional Record* in 1866, during the debate over the Fourteenth Amendment. Jacob Howard, a Republican senator from Michigan, explained that the amendment “protects the black man in his fundamental rights as a citizen with the same shield which it throws over the white man.” Howard assured his audience that the amendment did not guarantee black men the right to vote, even though he wished that it did, and

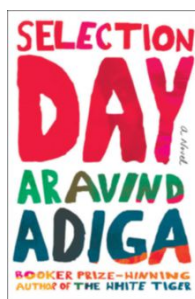
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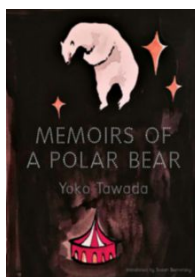
The New Odyssey, by Patrick Kingsley (*Liveright*). This chronicle of the refugee crisis—since 2014, more than a million people from Africa, the Middle East, and beyond have tried to reach Europe—argues that it is largely a manufactured disaster, the result of insufficient political will. The author accompanies migrants on perilous journeys across mountains, deserts, and the Mediterranean. He interviews traffickers, volunteers, and overwhelmed bureaucrats. His lead character is a Syrian refugee, Hashem al-Souki, who makes a harrowing boat trip from Egypt to Italy, navigates Europe by foot and rail, and seeks asylum in Sweden. As seen through Hashem’s tired, tense eyes, the Continent is a place of mystery and danger. To avoid detection, he makes a show of reading local newspapers in each town he passes through.



My Utmost, by Macy Halford (*Knopf*). This timely memoir seeks to reconcile an evangelical upbringing in Texas with literary life in a godless New York. Halford’s Christian friends call her an Esther—“heaven-sent to labor among the heathen.” With new friends, Halford (who worked at this magazine) is self-conscious about her love for Oswald Chambers’s daily devotional “My Utmost for His Highest,” a favorite of Jerry Falwell’s. Here she reclaims Chambers, a turn-of-the-century Scottish minister, as an artist manqué and a radical thinker. Wrestling with the way that her religion “condemned so much of what I loved,” she makes a persuasive case that “we all must learn to live with mystery, however clever we are, however much of it we dispel.”



Selection Day, by Aravind Adiga (*Scribner*). In this energetic satire, two brothers from Mumbai’s slums hope to play for a local cricket team. Guided by their tyrannical father, who warns them of “three principal dangers on their path to glory—premature shaving, pornography, and car driving”—they try to balance the pressure of potential athletic glory with the challenges of adolescence and early adulthood. Though the characters sometimes drift into caricature, Adiga’s barbed prose deftly skewers India’s tangled religious and class dynamics, and its literary stereotypes. One character notes, “What we Indians want in literature, at least the kind written in English, is not literature at all, but flattery.” To his credit, Adiga offers none.



Memoirs of a Polar Bear, by Yoko Tawada, translated from the German by Susan Bernofsky (*New Directions*). The imagined family history of Knut (2006–11), an actual polar bear in Berlin’s zoo, is the subject of this fable-like novel by a Japanese writer based in Germany. Knut’s fictional grandmother retires from a circus and writes a celebrated autobiography, “Thunderous Applause for My Tears.” Her daughter aspires to be an actress, but, finding few roles, joins a circus, communing with her keeper through dreams and eventually writing the keeper’s life story. Knut’s fame eclipses that of his ancestors, but he has lost their powers of communication and becomes isolated. Tawada’s strange, exquisite book toys with ideas of language, identity, and what it means to own someone else’s story or one’s own.

here he quoted James Madison, who'd written that "those who are to be bound by laws, ought to have a voice in making them," at which point Reverdy Johnson, a Democrat from Maryland, wondered how far such a proposition could be extended, especially given the amendment's use of the word "person":

MR. JOHNSON: Females as well as males?

MR. HOWARD: Mr. Madison does not say anything about females.

MR. JOHNSON: "Persons."

MR. HOWARD: I believe Mr. Madison was old enough and wise enough to take it for granted that there was such a thing as the law of nature which has a certain influence even in political affairs, and that by that law women and children are not regarded as the equals of men.

History isn't a feather. It's an albatross.

LAST YEAR, NEIL GORSUCH delivered a memorial tribute to Scalia, in which he said that the Justice's greatest contribution to jurisprudence was his commitment to historical inquiry. Gorsuch said that Scalia had reminded legal scholars that, rather than contemplating the future, "judges should instead strive (if humanly and so imperfectly) to apply the law as it is, focusing backward, not forward."

Scalia spent much of his career arguing for the importance of history in the interpretation of the law. "If ideological judging is the malady," Scalia said in 2010, "the avowed application of such personal preferences will surely hasten the patient's demise, and the use of history is far closer to being the cure than being the disease."

Gorsuch's account of this debate is more measured. Whose history? How far back? "In due process cases, the Supreme Court has frequently looked not only to this nation's history, but also to English common law," Gorsuch has written. "But why stop there? Why not examine Roman or Greek or some other ancient precedent as, say, Justice Blackmun did in his opinion for the Court in *Roe v. Wade*? And what about contemporary experience in other Western countries?" His book on assisted suicide contains a chapter, called "The Debate Over History," that applies the history test to the question of the right to die. He began his survey with Plato, hopped across the centuries, and decided that, while a consensus had grown "that suicide is es-

entially a medical problem," the historical record offers, at best, limited support for the idea of a right to assisted suicide and euthanasia. Gorsuch, an eloquent and candid writer, has his doubts about the history test. He writes, "The history test, for all its promise of constraining judicial discretion, carries with it a host of unanswered methodological questions and does not always guarantee the sort of certainty one might perhaps hope for."

Gorsuch may be dubious about the history test, but he happens to be a particularly subtle scholar of precedent. (He's a co-author of a new book, "The Law of Judicial Precedent"; Scalia had been meant to write the foreword.) And he's written powerfully about the relationship between history and the law. In 2015, Gorsuch wrote an opinion in a case that concerned Alfonso Deniz Robles. Deniz, a Mexican citizen, twice entered the United States illegally. He married an American citizen, and had four children. In 2005, the Tenth Circuit court ruled that an immigrant in Deniz's position was grandfathered into a lapsed program that allowed him to pay a fine and apply for residency, so Deniz applied for a visa. The government held up his application for years, and by the time it was reviewed the Board of Immigration Appeals, an executive agency, overruled the court, requiring him to leave the country for ten years before applying for residency. ("It was, like, Today you can wear a purple hat but tomorrow you can't," Deniz's wife, Teresa, told me. "It was mind-boggling.") Deniz appealed, on the ground that his rights to due process had been violated.

The appeal reached Gorsuch's court in 2014, at which point immigration services told Deniz, as Gorsuch explained, "that he'd have to start the decade-long clock now even though if he'd known back in 2005 that this was his only option, his wait would be almost over." Writing for the court, Gorsuch explained that judicial reasoning is always backward-looking, while legislation is forward-looking; he cited a thirteenth-century English jurist to establish that the presumption against retroactive legislation is nearly as old as common law, and the retrospective effect of judicial decisions, he said, has been estab-

lished for almost a thousand years. But what about acts of the executive branch? Gorsuch said that if an executive agency is acting like a judge its rulings are retroactive, but if it's acting like a legislature its rulings are prospective. That is, if the Board of Immigration Appeals makes a new policy, it can't apply it to people who made choices under the old policy. The Tenth Circuit ruled in favor of Deniz. He still doesn't have a green card. That will likely take years.

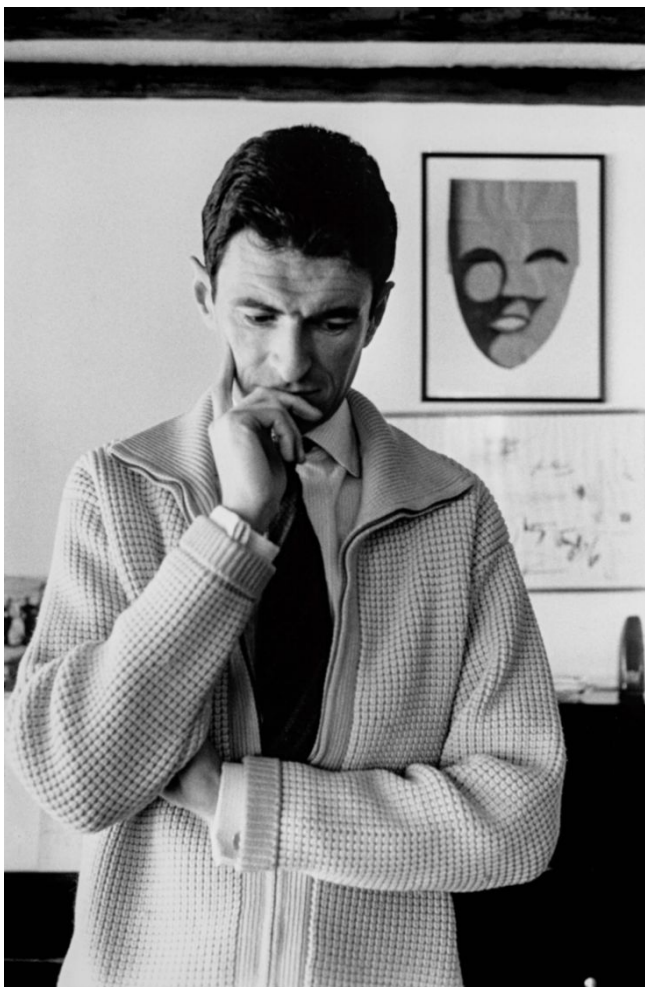
The chain of cases that are of interest to Stone in "Sex and the Constitution" will be revisited by a newly constituted Supreme Court, once Scalia's replacement finally takes a seat. More immediately, though, the Court will be asked to rule on the due-process and equal-protection-violation claims made in opposition to President Trump's early executive orders, as a matter of federal law. "A temporary absence from the country does not deprive longtime residents of their right to due process," eighteen state attorneys general and others argued in a brief challenging the Trump Administration's travel ban. Gorsuch's several rulings urging restraint of the executive branch carry a particular weight in this new political moment, in which the history test is already being applied to those orders. "The framers worried that placing the power to legislate, prosecute, and jail in the hands of the Executive would invite the sort of tyranny they experienced at the hands of a whimsical king," Gorsuch wrote in a dissent from 2015. A lot of people are still worried about that.

Alfonzo and Teresa Deniz, who live in Wyoming with their kids, have so far spent more than forty thousand dollars on legal fees. They've got another court date, on March 21st, the day after the Senate Judiciary Committee begins hearings on Gorsuch's nomination. The law keeps changing. "You hear a lot of things," Teresa told me. "It's scary." She's terrified that her children will lose their father. I asked Teresa if she and her husband had ever met Neil Gorsuch. She said no. She didn't know that he'd been nominated to the Supreme Court. I asked her if she had a message for the Court. "Look at the families," she said. She began to cry. She said, "I just hope that they can come up with something that is justice." ♦

LIFE AS FICTION

A novel about the novelist Jerzy Kosinski.

BY RUTH FRANKLIN



IN 1982, JERZY KOSINSKI, the Polish-American novelist and literary celebrity, appeared on the cover of the *Times Magazine*, photographed by Annie Leibovitz. Naked to the waist, his shoulder leaning against a stable door, he wore polo boots and tight white riding pants; horse tack dangled whiplike from his left hand. His skin was bronzed and glistening, his chest hairless, his expression opaque: stern, wary, perhaps a little confrontational. The accompanying article, a fawning profile by Barbara Gelb, labelled him “the ultimate survivor.” Calling herself

a “connoisseur of survivors,” Gelb wrote that of all the Holocaust survivors she knew Kosinski was both the most damaged—“psychically and physically”—and the most candid about it: “starkly in his fiction, wittily in the drawing room.”

In the nineteen-sixties, Kosinski had become famous in Manhattan literary circles for his astonishing tales about the brutalities he had suffered during the war. Abandoned by his parents at the age of six, he claimed, he had roamed the countryside alone, witnessing rape, murder, and incest, constantly fearing

for his life. Kosinski turned those stories into his first novel, “The Painted Bird” (1965), which, for a time, was considered a major work of Holocaust literature. The book takes its name from an emblematic act of cruelty: a peasant, unusually skilled at trapping birds, paints his captives before releasing them, then watches as the rest of the flock, failing to recognize their former comrades, brutally attack them.

It was universally assumed that Kosinski was the painted bird of the title, and that the book, like the stories its author so often told about his life, was autobiographical. Elie Wiesel endorsed it as a chronicle of “unusual power”; others marvelled that Kosinski had written it in English, given that it was not his first language. Its successor, “Steps”—which David Foster Wallace later described as a “collection of unbelievably creepy little allegorical tableaux done in a terse elegant voice that’s like nothing else anywhere ever”—won the National Book Award for fiction in 1969. Kosinski married the widow of a wealthy steel magnate and became friendly with numerous celebrities, including Peter Sellers, who starred in the hit movie made from “Being There,” Kosinski’s third novel.

But, just a few months after the *Times Magazine* profile, an article in the *Village Voice* alleged that the stories in “The Painted Bird” were inconsistent and, perhaps, merely imaginary. It gradually emerged that Kosinski had not spent the war alone and at the mercy of Polish peasants; he and his parents went into hiding, living as Christians under assumed names. Furthermore, the exposé accused him of employing assistants to help him write the novel and his other books. Sworn to secrecy, uncredited, and sometimes unpaid, the assistants claimed to have translated chapters of “The Painted Bird” from Kosinski’s Polish original and even to have rewritten the bulk of his later manuscripts. Kosinski denied these claims, but he never recovered his prestige. In 1991, he killed himself, and many attributed his suicide to the decline of his reputation and career.

That is the outline of Kosinski’s story, as well as it can be separated from the myths he wove around it. A comprehensive 1996 biography by

Kosinski’s tales of wartime Poland made, and unmade, his reputation.

James Park Sloan concludes that the *Village Voice* got it right, regarding both Kosinski's wartime experiences and the editorial assistance he sought and received on his novels. But the figure at its center remains as enigmatic as his expression in the Leibovitz portrait. Kosinski's motto, Sloan writes, was *larvatus prodeo*: "I go forth in disguise." Was he indeed a painted bird—cast out, forced to conceal his identity, abused, his encounters with others resulting only in brutality? Or was he also a bird painter, blending fact and fiction in his own life and the lives of others in a way that was deliberately deceitful, even sadistic?

IN "JERZY" (Bellevue Literary Press), a fictional fantasia on the life of Kosinski, Jerome Charyn seeks less to answer these questions than to dance in circles around them. In a career spanning more than fifty years, Charyn has published thirty novels, including, in 2010, "The Secret Life of Emily Dickinson," which narrates a fictional version of the poet's life in her own voice—a literary license at which some readers took offense. This time, he has chosen a more circumspect approach, telling Kosinski's story primarily from the perspectives of various characters who encounter him: Ian, Peter Sellers's driver, who is tasked with persuading Kosinski to allow his boss to play the lead role in "Being There"; Svetlana Alliluyeva, Stalin's daughter, who met Kosinski when they were briefly neighbors in Princeton; Kosinski's first wife, here a petroleum-jelly heiress "cast out of the *Social Register* after her recent marriage to a Polish parvenu"; and a dominatrix who goes by the moniker Anna Karenina. Kosinski slips in and out of their fragmented narratives, a presence at once signally important and maddeningly elusive.

Of these figures, Svetlana Alliluyeva is the least fictionalized. Perhaps not coincidentally, she is the book's most fully drawn character. Having escaped from her father's Soviet Union—"I was put on display like a museum piece, told whom to marry, whom not to see"—she is nonplussed to find herself in suburban Princeton, a place she chose because she'd heard the countryside would remind her of

her dacha. Alone in a strange country, separated from her children, she is unimpressed by the "nest of perfect little streets" but glad to be able to pursue her fascination with American literature, which her father forbade her to read. On the bookshelves of the house she rents, she finds a copy of "The Painted Bird," and the book speaks to her feelings of loss and abandonment. "I, too, was a war orphan, though my father was still alive in '43 and '44—he had abandoned me to save the motherland. But I had felt the same terror as that little boy." The claim would be outrageous if "The Painted Bird" were truly a Holocaust chronicle, but our knowledge of the book's fraudulence makes the idea seem legitimate.

Lana, as she calls herself—many characters in this book go by multiple names—seeks out Kosinski. In a dark corner of the Nassau Inn, they hold hands and exchange intimacies, he with a glass of buttermilk (he claims to have an allergy to alcohol), she over a plate of strawberry shortcake ("as close as I could ever get to a charlotte russe"). He tells her that he once spied for the Polish secret service, deliberately providing misleading testimony: "That was my beginning as a novelist—lies, lies, lies. . . . I lie even while I speak the truth." He also admits that he is a "fraud" who "cannot write my own novels without a helper." They take trips together to Atlantic City and New York, she pretending to be a tsarevna and he dressing as her chauffeur; they have a running gag based on Gogol's story "The Nose," and in the Rainbow Room Kosinski introduces himself as "General Gogol," her military aide. But eventually she runs away from him, weary of his sadistic games. "He picked at whatever sores and wounds I had—his love was shot through with hate. He clawed at my weaknesses while he held my hand," she says. This seems an apt description of what it might have been like to love, or to be loved by, the author of "The Painted Bird."

Only in this episode does Kosinski come vividly into focus. His opacity is perhaps appropriate, given that the actual Kosinski was a figure almost lost beneath his layers of imposture, but, as the book goes on, it becomes harder to

invest much feeling in someone so maddeningly indeterminate. Often he seems almost like a stock figure, performing the role of Jerzy Kosinski before a credulous audience. Ian, sent by Sellers to visit him, sees him as "a dapper bird of prey, with piercing dark eyes and a prominent beak," an adult version of the "bird-boy" of his book. At a cocktail party they attend together, he is "the jester king," entertaining the hostess's "suits and sycophants with tales of his childhood," though some attentive listeners discover "inconsistencies in the fabric." At one point, Kosinski the character tricks Sellers by hiding within the cushions of a sofa, a prank for which, in real life, Kosinski was famous. Rather than yielding new insights into Kosinski, this section of the book mainly rehearses familiar stories about him. "The book was a replica of his secret life, and the monstrosities he revealed had the sting of truth. . . . Even if some ghost had helped guide Kosinski's hand, there was still nothing else remotely like *The Painted Bird*," Ian concludes, inconclusively.

In Kosinski's novel, the peasant who paints birds does so when the woman he loves fails to appear at the spot where they normally meet for erotic encounters. He isn't motivated simply by cruelty; his violence is an angry reaction to the romantic rejection he feels. Charyn's Jerzy, too, is often in the role of unrequited—or perhaps unsatisfiable—lover. This is most evident in the episode related by Anna Karenina, the dominatrix, who calls herself Kosinski's "heartbeat as a writer." She, too, lives in disguise; her real name is Anita Goldstein—she mostly goes by Anya—and she comes not from Budapest, as she claims, but from the Bronx, Charyn's own home town. The author of a lesbian porn novel, she hosts a literary salon, which Kosinski attends shortly after his arrival in America. When he tells her of the atrocities he suffered, she insists that he write them down. But the book he produced was "chaotic, without a fine thread."

Then they encounter Gabriela, a gorgeous red-haired orphan who has been jailed for prostitution. Both fall in love with her, enacting sexual fantasies in which she plays Little Red

Riding Hood and they play the wolf. But more important than the erotic spell she casts is the magic she is able to work with Kosinski's novel. "Because she herself had been abandoned and abused, the abandoned boy of *The Painted Bird* must have seemed like her own lost twin," Anya says. "And with little strokes—a word and a line here and there—she restored pieces of the missing thread." As in the case of Svetlana's identification with Kosinski's novel, Charyn suggests, persuasively, that the value of "The Painted Bird" does not rest on its literal veracity as a Holocaust chronicle but on its power as a metaphor for the human condition. "We're all painted birds, freaks with our own eccentric coloring, and wherever we fly, the unpainted birds peck at us and drag us to the ground," Gabriela tells Anya. "Then we'll disguise our feathers," Anya responds, but Gabriela is unimpressed: "And be like every other unpainted bird? Thank you, Auntie, but I'll keep my color."

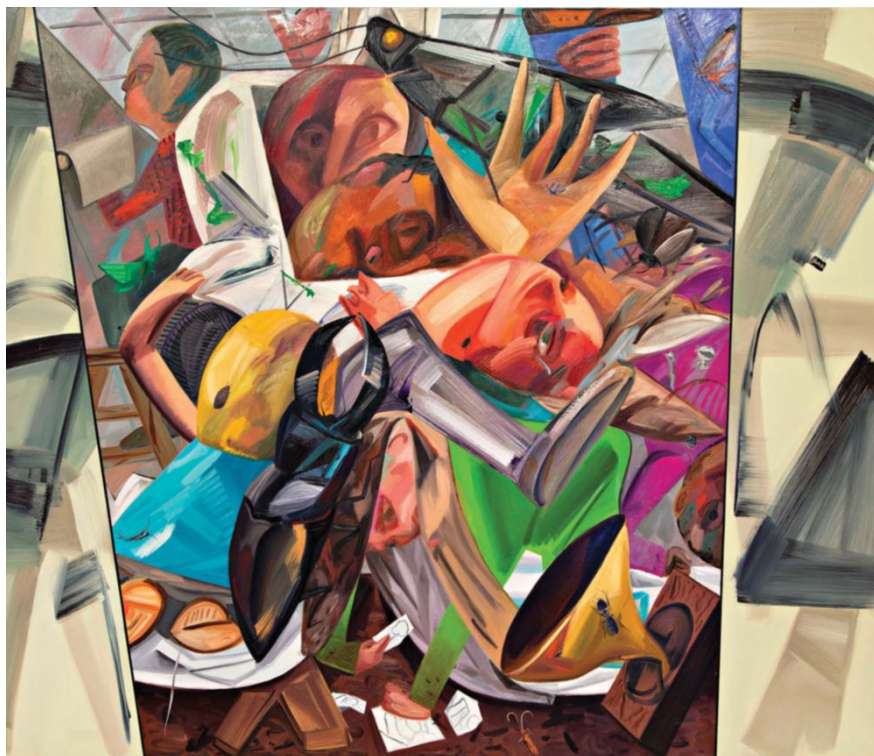
It is a choice, one feels, that Kosinski would also have made. The final section of Charyn's novel reimagines parts of "The Painted Bird" as they might actually have taken place—a moving attempt to envision the real wartime traumas that led Kosinski to invent fake ones. Jerzy's father is a master strategist who employs a variety of desperate measures to preserve his family, even adopting a blond Gentile child to serve as a decoy. His mother has a secret of her own and enlists her son to help protect it. During these formative years, Jerzy develops a taste for the life of a spy and for the power that a secret-holder can wield, and he learns to fear the potentially fatal consequences of exposure.

Charyn doesn't try to provide a definite answer to the crucial question of why Kosinski passed off his most famous book as something it was not, but this last section goes some way toward suggesting why he felt the need to conceal himself behind a mask. Perhaps, like its creator, "The Painted Bird" had to go forth in disguise. In this way Kosinski was indeed the ultimate survivor, though not in the way that Barbara Gelb meant. He never ceased to play the role that had saved him. ♦

WHAT'S NEW?

The Whitney Biennial arrives at an unexpected political moment.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



Painting makes a striking comeback: Dana Schutz's "Elevator" (2017).

THE FIRST Whitney Biennial at the museum's two-year-old downtown digs (owing to the move, it comes a year late) aims "to gauge the state of art in America today." The result, which is earnestly attentive to political moods and themes, already feels nostalgic. Most of the works were chosen before last year's Presidential election. Remember back then? Worry, but not yet alarm, permeated the cosmopolitan archipelago of new art's creators, functionaries, and fans. Now there's a storm. The Age of Trump erodes assumptions about art's role as a barometer—and sometime engine—of social change. Radicalism has lurched to the right, and populist nationalism, though it has had little creative influence so far, challenges sophisticated art's presumption to the crown of American culture. The crisis makes

any concerted will to "resist" awkward for those whose careers depend on rich collectors and elite institutions, sitting ducks for plain-folk resentment. Of course, artists are alert to ironies. The near future promises surprising reactions and adaptations to the new world disorder. But, for now, all former bets are off. The ones placed by the Biennial's curators, Christopher Y. Lew and Mia Locks, preface an unfolding saga in which, willy-nilly, all of us are characters.

The show is winningly theatrical in its use of the Whitney's majestic new spaces. Lew and Locks sensibly show far fewer participants than in the 2014 Biennial—sixty-three, down from a hundred and three—given the futility of trying to comprehend the ranks of serious artists, swelled by the field's wealth and glamour, who have come to number in the many

thousands. The curators have opted for depth over breadth, affording many of the artists what amounts to pocket solo shows. The criteria seem to be technical skill and engaging subject matter, with formal aesthetics taking third place. Most substantial, on all counts, are the works by several painters, in a striking comeback for a medium that was often sidelined in the Biennials of the past two decades. The revival may reflect a market that is ever avid for things to adorn walls, but I think it also fulfills a desire for relief from our pixelated ambience. Dana Schutz is a new master, with subjects that are frankly goofy—people and giant insects piled together in an elevator, for instance—but which she renders with powerfully volumetric, big-brushed forms that are at once lyrical and monumental. Jo Baer, famous half a century ago for her minimalist abstractions, astonishes with perfectly scaled, sensitive paintings, on gray fields, of mingled artifacts, buildings, and landscapes that are redolent of cultures ancient, medieval, and modern.

The work in the Biennial that you are most apt to remember, "The Meat Grinder's Iron Clothes" (2017), by the Los Angeles artist Samara Golden, marries technique and storytelling on a grandiose scale. Golden has constructed eight miniaturized sets of elaborately furnished domestic, ceremonial, and institutional interiors. They sit on top of and are mounted, upside down, beneath tiers that frame one of the Whitney's tall and wide window views of the Hudson River. Surrounding mirrors multiply the sets upward, downward, and sideways, to infinity. To reach a platform with a midpoint view of the work, you ascend darkened ramps, on which ominous hums, bongs, and whooshes can be heard. Concealed fans add breezes. Politics percolate in evocations of social class and function, with verisimilitude tipping toward the surreal in, for example, a set that suggests at once a beauty parlor, a medical facility, and a prison. But the work's main appeal is its stunning labor-intensiveness: sofas and chairs finely upholstered, tiny medical instruments gleaming on wheeled carts. Golden is the most

COURTESY DANA SCHUTZ/PETZEL GALLERY AND CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS, BERLIN; PHOTOGRAPH: BILL ORCUTT

ambitious of several artists in the show who appear bent on rivalling Hollywood production design, with a nearly uniform level of skill. I'm reminded of a friend's remark, apropos of the recent New York art fairs: "I thought I missed good art, but that's always rare. What I miss is bad art."

Political causes register in mostly understated ways, as with suites of photographs or videos pertaining to racial, ethnic, and gender identities. Again, you will seek bad art in vain, unless you count the crude-on-purpose banners by the California-born Chicago artist Cauleen Smith, with their perfunctory design and messages of laconic anguish. (One reads, "No wonder I go under.") Also rugged, quite effectively, are the satiric paintings and drawings by Celeste Dupuy-Spencer, a New Yorker transplanted to Los Angeles, whose targets range from narcissistic leftists to the crowd at a Trump rally (the latter is subtitled "And some of them I assume are good people"). L.A. is also represented by two much discussed artists: Rafa Esparza, who has created a room of handmade adobe bricks, as a shelter for works by other artists, and Henry Taylor, who offers a stark painting, in his more usually infectious Expressionist manner, of a black man killed by the police.

Staggeringly beautiful, in image and sound (including an orchestral version of "Stormy Weather" that just about made me cry), is a documentary video shot on an Aleut-populated island in the Bering Sea, by Sky Hopinka, a Native American from Washington State. The show's most strident agitprop is "Debtfair" (2012-17), an enormous installation by a largely New York-based group, Occupy Museums, which emerged from the Occupy Wall Street campaign. In text and in a mélange of mediums, the piece expounds on the plight of contemporary artists burdened by financial debt, mainly from student loans, relative to the profiteers of the booming art-as-asset economy. Incorporated works are for sale, at prices related to how much the artists owe.

Ecological activism has an inning with "Root sequence. Mother tongue"

(2017), by Asad Raza, who is from Buffalo and divides his time between New York and Brussels. The piece is composed of twenty-six trees in progressive stages of budding, leafing, and blooming, in the accelerated spring of a gallery that has a sunrise-facing glass wall. On-site caretakers will inform you, in eager detail, about the varieties: cherry, birch, persimmon, and others. You may find it hard to tell the forest from (forgive me) the twee, the piece is so wholesome. It's pretty, though. For a savage antidote, nearby there's "Real Violence" (2017), by the shockmeister Jordan Wolfson, who caused a stir at the David Zwirner Gallery, last year, with a huge robotic mechanism of chains and pulleys that dragged and slammed around the room a life-size puppet with a face like Howdy Doody's and pleading video eyes. Here Wolfson provides virtual-reality headsets for a video of him bashing the head of another man with a baseball bat, on a street lined with office buildings, to the accompaniment of the sung Hanukkah prayer. Your discomfort is first abetted and then abated by the continual twitching of the victim, whom a single blow should have quieted. How Wolfson made what is in fact an animatronic doll appear real is a mystery typical of new art's galloping technological novelties, and one likely to become old hat in short order. (I don't know about you, but V.R. makes me feel less transported to another place than eliminated from it.)

As jazzy as many of the works in this Biennial are, there's an air of complacent calm: so many tasks superbly completed, so many social issues responsibly advanced, so much professionalism in evidence. Engineers sometimes say that a machine works with maximum efficiency just before it breaks. That's my feeling about this show's beamish collegiality, and it might have been the same, only less painfully, were Hillary Clinton in the White House. Times of social upheaval throw artists back on reconceiving their purpose and on choosing whether to address public affairs or to maintain refuge from them. Anguish is assured. Conflicts are probable. The next Biennial bodes drama. ♦

PRETTY AND GRITTY

"Beauty and the Beast" and "T2 Trainspotting."

BY ANTHONY LANE

*Emma Watson is Belle and Dan Stevens is the Beast in Bill Condon's movie.*

TO SAY THAT the latest Disney production, "Beauty and the Beast," is offering something brand-new would be wide of the mark. A scholarly paper published last year presented "phylogenetic analyses" of famous folktales, assessed "the posterior probability of ancestral states," and estimated that the origins of "Beauty and the Beast" date back to "between 2500 and 6000 years ago." All of which means that Disney's costume designers had ample opportunity to prepare themselves, and no excuse for not getting that butter-yellow ball gown *just* right.

This year's version of the legend, directed by Bill Condon, is deeply in debt to Disney's previous effort, which came out in 1991 and became the first animated film to be nominated for Best Picture at the Oscars. Condon's movie is a live-action affair, stuffed with real actors, although in many cases the reality is stretched and squeezed beyond recognition. If you cast Ewan McGregor as Lumière, a manservant who has been transformed into a talking candelabra, and whom we don't see in the flesh—heavily wigged—until the final

scene, how far have you actually strayed beyond the cartoon? Disney is set on submitting its famous features to this brand of reboot (we have already had "The Jungle Book," and "Dumbo" awaits), but, given the congestion of special effects involved, the action is scarcely live. It's in limbo.

The plot, like much of the dialogue, is preserved intact from 1991. Once again, we find the bookish Belle (Emma Watson) living in a village, worshipped by her father, Maurice (Kevin Kline), and wooed without cease—or success—by the vainglorious Gaston (Luke Evans). Maurice goes astray and arrives at a spellbound castle, where he warms his posterior probability against an open hearth. Having foolishly picked a rose, he is made captive by the Beast (Dan Stevens), the monster formerly known as prince. He owns the joint, and pines for the day when he will be sprung from his uglifying hex by the touch of love. Cue Belle, who turns up and takes her father's place. Also in residence, along with Lumière, are Cogsworth the clock (Ian McKellen), Mrs. Potts the teapot (Emma Thompson), and so forth. There

are expanded roles for the wardrobe (Audra McDonald) and the flirtatious feather duster (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), whom Lumière likes to whisk off her feet. New to the game is a self-playing harpsichord (Stanley Tucci), who, in battle, fires his ivory keys like darts from a crossbow. Diversity reigns, and the finale puts a pair of waltzers into a same-sex clinch. Talk about a happy ending.

In the meantime, something odd has happened to the music. In addition to the songs by Alan Menken and the late Howard Ashman, which were surgically implanted into the ears of children and their parents more than a quarter of a century ago, and which retain an indisputable charm, we are granted a smattering of mini-songs by Menken and Tim Rice, which seem to start awkwardly or to be sliced off in their prime: one to accompany a dance, for example, and another to be crooned by Maurice at his workbench. The Beast has a freshly minted lament, "For Evermore," and his servants join forces for "Days in the Sun." The hitch with these addenda is not their emotional gentility, which is a Disney staple, or Rice's lyrics (though Ashman's are still the snapper), but our growing sense that the narrative is being held up rather than advanced. Indeed, in one instance, it gets wound back, as Belle and the Beast are wafted by wizardry to a crumbling loft, which she suddenly serenades: "This is the Paris of my childhood." *Quoi?*

If there's one thing we don't need here, it's a backstory. And, if there's one thing the movie does demand, it's a dose of pep and ginger in the heroine, plus an urge to pump up the volume. Emma Watson delivers her melodies purely, demurely, and cleanly on the note, like a chorister, but that is not enough. Heaven knows, Julie Andrews was equally sweet in "The Sound of Music," but she could also let rip with "I Have Confidence," arms flung wide, as if to confess that sweetness alone would get you nowhere. Belle, dissing the local meathead and straining at the leash of her environment, marked a leap in Disney, when the role was sung by Paige O'Hara, in 1991, and the oomph of her carolling signalled her intent. The voice, for Belle as well as for Fräulein Maria, *is* the character, and Watson, though she radiates a sane and

freckled healthiness, is too weak in the pipes to grab you by the ears and make the film her own.

Dan Stevens, dimly discernible under a hundredweight of pelt, has more luck. He lends a bite of urgency to his songs, and rarely skips a chance to claw at his plight, even risking a wry amusement. “I had an expensive education,” he says, on the threshold of his massive library. (As if reading ever helped.) What Stevens does, in other words, is refine the basic Beastly idea—the boor whose heart is gentle—with a glumly sophisticated wit. It’s a daring move, yet it comes at a price: he’s not scary. When Belle commands him, at their initial meeting, to “come into the light,” she hardly bothers to quake at what appears. I hope that I’m wrong, and that children rear back from this ogre as their grandparents did from the witch in “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.” After all, if fear is easily mastered, without a struggle, then you have no fairy tale to speak of. Jean Cocteau knew as much, and that is why, in “La Belle et la Bête,” his 1946 remolding of the story, Belle admits, with a dreamy look, “I like being frightened.”

Something else clings to that unwithering movie, much as it hovers around the ancient myth: the scent of sex. Remember the fur throw that slides off the bed, the smoke that reeks from the Beast after a kill, and his sublime observation to Belle, once her yearning has switched him back into a prince: “It’s as though you missed my ugliness.” The lady preferred the animal. Such thoughts are out of bounds, needless to say, in the Disney garden, where the rose of desire is definitely not for the

plucking. Stevens’s horns are no problem; horniness, no way. What the films provide, as compensation, is a banquet of the decent and the sumptuous, where filigrees of gold float through the air and land on the silk of a dress. You can see where the money went (a hundred and sixty million dollars of it), and try to calculate how many multiples of that sum “Beauty and the Beast” will yield. It feels both looser and beefier than the 1991 movie, running forty-five minutes longer and lacking its compacted delights, and Condon cannot lay a paw on Cocteau. Still, the sheer dexterity is overwhelming, and only the sternest viewer will be able to resist the onslaught of such thoroughly marketed magic. “Beauty and the Beast” is delectably done; when it’s over, though, and when the spell is snapped, it melts away, like cotton candy on the tongue.

FOR FANS OF Ewan McGregor, these are confusing times. One moment, he’s a kind of haunted candlestick, waxing lyrical in a flickering French accent; the next, he’s knocking around Edinburgh, getting clobbered with pool cues in lousy pubs, scoring heroin, and loosing off lavish curses in his native burr. The film in question is “T2 Trainspotting,” directed by Danny Boyle, and how he managed to sneak that title past the makers of “Terminator 2: Judgment Day” I haven’t a clue.

It is twenty years since the events of “Trainspotting,” and Renton (McGregor), less whip-thin than he used to be, is back in town. His partners in crime are still there, and they haven’t forgotten that he fled, long ago, with the loot. Daniel Murphy (Ewan

Bremner), better known as Spud, is too much of a junkie to care, but Simon Williamson (Jonny Lee Miller), or Sick Boy, is at least half-bent on revenge, and the terrifying Francis Begbie (Robert Carlyle), or Franco, can think of little else. Given that Franco would sooner inscribe your face with a broken glass than buy you a drink, Renton needs to watch out.

Like “Beauty and the Beast,” Boyle’s movie glances backward, though its mission is not to refurbish the old but to try, however grudgingly, to shake it off—not a bad image for Britain, both north and south of the border. The mission fails: “Where I come from, the past is something to forget, but here it’s all you talk about.” Such are the wise words of Veronika (Anjela Nedyalkova), Sick Boy’s Bulgarian girlfriend, with whom he plans to open a shiny new brothel. (Or “an artisanal bed-and-breakfast experience,” as Renton refers to it, when they apply for a development grant from the European Union; so *that’s* why Scotland voted against Brexit.) “T2” cannot hope to break the mold, as “Trainspotting” did, but Boyle and his cast rifle eagerly through the shards: a motley of plot scraps, crazed camera angles, flashbacks, trips, sight gags, and musical yelps. When Sick Boy chides his pal for being “a tourist in your own youth,” you start to wonder: is Boyle rebuking himself, warding off accusations of nostalgia, or—as I like to think—grappling with the sadness and the madness of being addicted to the highs of your lost life? ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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VOLUME XCIII, NO. 6, March 27, 2017. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 13 & 20, June 5 & 12, July 10 & 17, August 7 & 14, and December 18 & 25) by Condé Nast, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Elizabeth Hughes, publisher, chief revenue officer; Risa Aronson, associate publisher advertising; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Fabio Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman emeritus; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., president & chief executive officer; David E. Geithner, chief financial officer; James M. Norton, chief business officer, president of revenue. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

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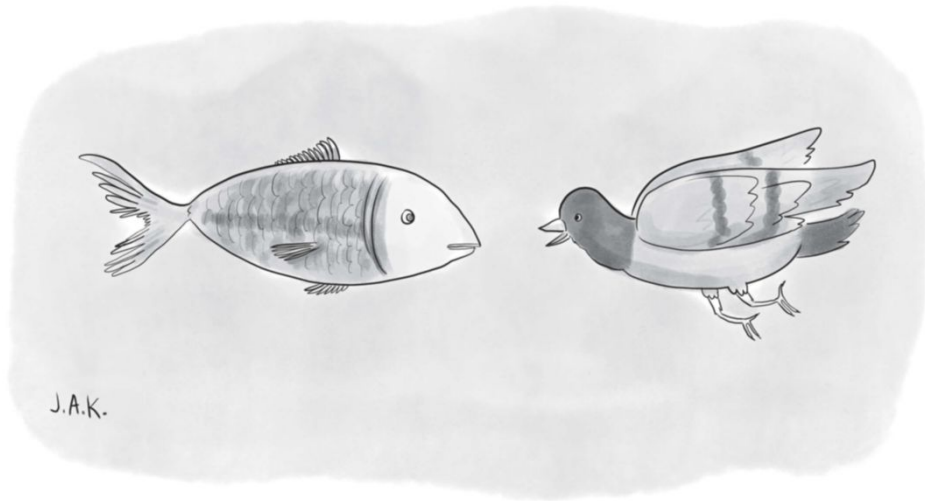
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Jason Adam Katzenstein, must be received by Sunday, March 26th. The finalists in the March 13th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 10th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS



“Personally, I’m not a big fan of modern architecture.”
Peter Bonelli, Atlantic Beach, Fla.

“I invented fire. He invested in it.”
John Pistell, Stony Brook, N.Y.

“Getting past the guard is easy. How do we remove the paintings?”
Clinton Guthrie, Queens, N.Y.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“No, you grow up.”
Eric Behrens, Austin, Tex.